

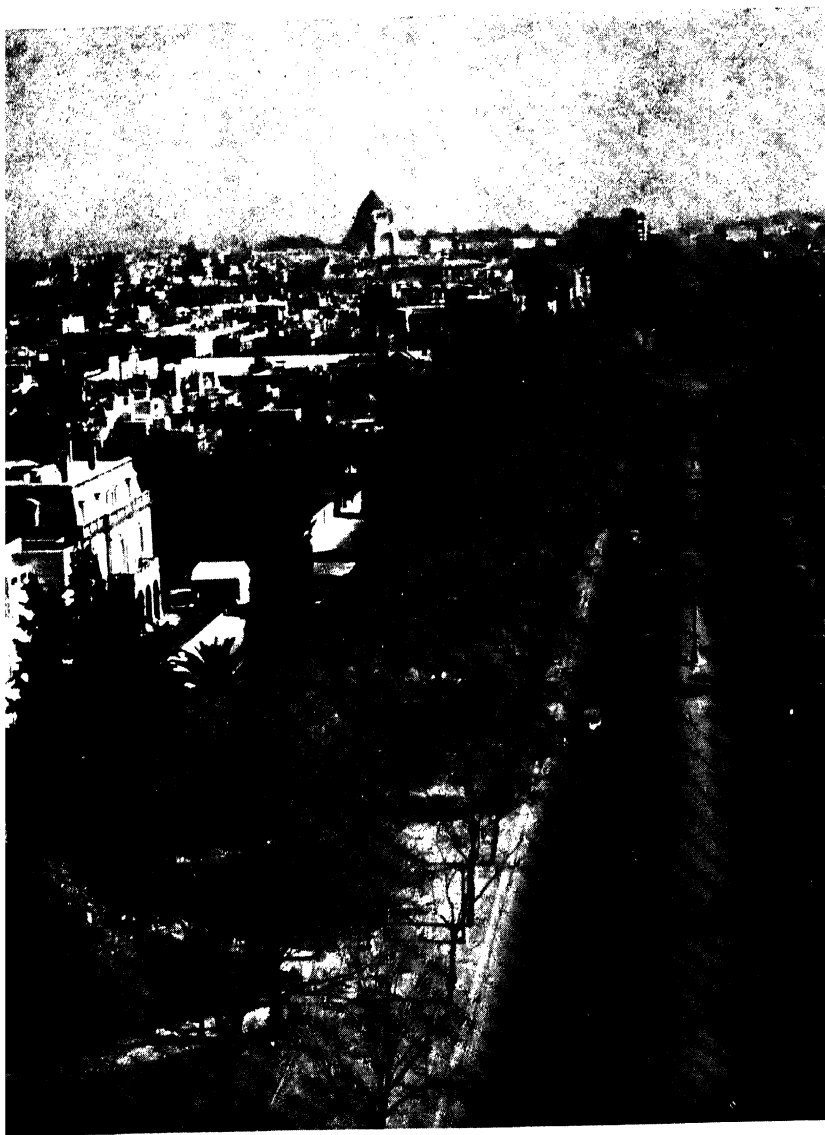






# MEXICAN KALEIDOSCOPE





Mexico City's Paseo de la Reforma, looking from Chapultepec towards the city centre. The photograph was taken in the early morning before the traffic was abroad. (*page 27*)

# MEXICAN KALEIDOSCOPE

BY

NORMAN PELHAM WRIGHT, F.R.G.S.



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# CONTENTS

FOREWORD	vii
CHAPTER	
I GENERALITIES	i
II MEXICO D.F.	17
III OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: OAXACA AND SONORA	40
IV THE APPEAL OF THE OLD—A SPOT OF ARCH- ÆOLOGY	73
V THE INDIANS—1945	97
VI NATURAL HISTORY INTERLUDE	114
VII THE ARTS	131
VIII TAILPIECE—MEXICO AND THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD	158
APPENDIX	164
INDEX	168

# ILLUSTRATIONS

View of Mexico City's Paseo de la Reforma	<i>frontispiece</i>
Popocatepetl's peak at dawn	<i>between pages 6-7</i>
Scene in a typical Indian market	
The "Chinampas" in the Valley of Mexico, near Mixcuic	
View of the south-east corner of the Valley of Mexico	„ 48-49
Street in the village of Mitla (Oaxaca)	
Cuernavaca panorama	
Young ladies of Yalalag, in "rodete" and "huipil"	
"Yalalag type" silver rosary crosses	
The jade Mixtec plaque from Santa María Albarradas	
Chico Romero, formerly chief of the Seris	„ 80-81
The abandoned Seri "houses" at Punta Chueca	
Maria and the blind woman	
Three small Seri maidens	
Views of the young volcano, Parícutín, taken late in 1943	
The author's collection of archaic heads and figurines	
Views of the colossal stone figures at Tula (Hidalgo)	
A Toltec frieze recently uncovered at Tula	
The vast Pyramid of the Sun at San Juan Teotihuacan	„ 96-97
The Xochicalco pyramid (Toltec culture)	
The plumed-serpent <i>motiv</i> on the Xochicalco pyramid	
The main stairway of the Aztec pyramid at Tenayuca	
The grim idol of Coatlinchán	
Detail of date-glyphs on a stela on the "Old Mayan Empire"	
A building known as "La Iglesia" (the Church) at Chichen Itzá	
A typical Maya Indian from the Territory of Quintana Roo	
Maya village head-men	
An Otomi Indian	
A Chamula (or Tzotzil) Indian from the State of Chiapas	
Mexicanas (i.e. women of the tribe descended from the Aztecs)	
An old man of the Tarascan tribe, Michoacán	
A Totonac woman from the state of Vera Cruz	„ 128-129
A young Totonac couple from Mazátepec, State of Puebla	
A fine Zapotec type from Oaxaca	
A "Zapoteco-serrana" (mountain Zapotec woman)	
A pair of prize-winning <i>tepeizcuintles</i> (Mexican Hairless Dogs)	
Mexico's chief scavengers—the <i>zopilote</i>	
The Black Vulture	
The Turkey Vulture	
Sea-lions at their breeding-colony	
Cupolas of the Franciscan "Capilla Real" at Cholula, Puebla	
The Augustinian Church at Ixmiquilpan, State of Hidalgo	
The ornate belfry of the church of Tlaxcalantongo	
Panotla Church, Tlaxcala. A fine ultra-baroque building	
The west front of the Augustinian church of Acolman	„ 144-145
The west front of the vast Dominican church at Yanhuítlán	
Detail of the plateresque sculpture on an archivolt	
Detail of the west front of Panotla Church, Tlaxcala	
Baroque detail, Oaxaca Cathedral	
Part of the gilt ultra-baroque retable	
Zapotec toys from Coyótepec, made of clay	
A fine specimen of a " <i>cántaro</i> " from Patamba, Michoacán	
Eighteenth century funerary candelabrum	
Zapotecs with gaudy <i>sarapes</i> for tourists	

## FOREWORD

THIS is a personal book about Mexico, and makes no claim to be an all-embracing reference work. It deals with many "things Mexican" that particularly interested me during three active years in the country. I enjoyed rather special facilities for getting to know it from one end to the other, and advantages such as perhaps few foreigners have obtained in the present decade.

For a variety of reasons, this book does not contain the latest information on the situation of Mexican Labour, the "Oil Question", or the relationship between Church and State, and those who seek to inform themselves on these somewhat controversial topics will be disappointed in reading these pages.

As, in almost every branch of activity or study, Mexico offers material of rather special interest, it has always attracted foreign observers and students of everything from its original inhabitants to its modern political structure. Anything like a comprehensive work is in consequence virtually impossible and I have not attempted it. This contribution to writings on Mexico nevertheless covers a fairly wide field, from archæology (for beginners) and agaves to zoology and Zapotec Indians.

When I commenced these jottings, I was vaguely aware that a number of Englishmen (and, latterly, of Americans) had written about Mexico before me. As the book developed, and I had recourse to more and more works of reference, I became increasingly conscious of this, and began to feel that Mexico must be one of the countries of the world which have most frequently been described in the English language. Would not yet another volume about it be somewhat superfluous? I then compiled the English bibliography shown in the Appendix, and after dipping into many of these books, I answered the question in the negative. The more recent of the ninety-two British authors I discovered have written from their own particular angle, reflecting their own special interests, and as no two people have the same approach to a subject, I believe

the present book will not be found to be a "rehash" of earlier books on Mexico, but to break much new ground.

In consequence, I offer no apology for being the ninety-third British writer on Mexico. On the contrary I see no reason why another ninety-three Britons should not find new and interesting angles in the future.

Many people have been more than kind and collaborative, and without the aid of some of them, this book could hardly have been completed.

I wish particularly to express my sincere thanks to the following people for advice and aid of one kind or another: Don Roberto Weitlaner, Doctor Narciso Souza-Novelo, Don Wigberto Jimenez Moreno, Don Pablo Martinez del Rio, Professor Rafael Martin del Campo, Señorita Chita de la Calle, Don Ricardo Pozas Arciniega, Don Manuel Toussaint, Licenciado José Pavia Crespo, the officers of the *Segunda Seccion* of the *Estado Mayor del Ejercito Nacional*, Mr. G. R. G. Conway, Lieutenant-Commander Peter Otway Smithers, R.N.V.R., Mr. Roger M. Keyes, Mr. N. A. M. Lindsay and Mr. T. P. Hesse. Finally I am above all grateful to Mr. Irwin Bullock, of Cambridge, for his constant and invaluable advice and help.

Mexico City, London, The Hague, 1945-6.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERALITIES

THE Englishman newly arrived in Mexico becomes at once aware of a startling difference between the facts and the vague and extremely inaccurate ideas of the country that are current at home amongst those who have never been there.

My own ideas of Mexico before I arrived, were, I fear, of the stereotyped variety and, if anything, possibly somewhat vaguer than the average. My knowledge of place-names, gleaned no doubt from browsing superficially over atlases, was probably limited to Mexico City, Vera Cruz, Monterrey, Yucatán, Chihuahua and Oaxaca. They meant little to me at the time, and mentally I murdered the pronunciation of the last two, for a knowledge of Spanish is no help. This state of mind is probably widespread.

In defence of ourselves, it must be admitted that our erroneous concepts of the Mexican scene and people have been, intentionally or unintentionally, nurtured by various factors.

The Mexicans claim that their Revolution (with a capital "R") is still in progress. A purist might prefer to use the word "evolution" for the present phase, as the violence and bloodshed of the Revolution proper have been superseded by an era of constructive retrenchment. However, the *Revolución* is, to most modern Mexicans, a cause for pride, and something grand and glorious. The "revolutionary" motif formed a very suitable subject for the type of "wild west" film popular in the '20's, and many Englishmen at home formed their first impressions of Mexico from this form of entertainment. It was sufficiently striking to leave for ever on the retina a sort of visual hotch-potch of moustached desperadoes, enormous sombreros, bejewelled revolvers, cacti and desert.

This nonsense is, in a modest way, corroborated by what might euphemistically be termed a form of modern Mexican art for export. Doubtless most of the silver ash-trays in the form of sombreros, the onyx book-ends portraying somnolent



peons under sombrero and *sarape*, and the "typical" water-colours redolent of hats and cacti, finish up in the United States, but such as reach England can only tend to confirm the false ideas born of the Mexican "Revolutionary" film.

Well, Mexico is not like that. Indeed it is doubtful whether any really representative part of it ever was for any prolonged period. There are cacti, about which I shall write more later; there are big hats; there is a colourfulness in the country, which even the world's greatest travellers have pronounced difficult to equal; a large proportion of the men still carry firearms, although at the present time there is legislation afoot to restrict the private use of pistols and revolvers. But a visit to Mexico, whether long or short, utterly fails to confirm the standard arm-chair ideas of the country which prevail in England, and doubtless throughout Europe.

The country's outline is roughly that of a cornucopia, and indeed the adoption of the cornucopia as a symbol would not be inappropriate, for it is accepted that Mexico vies with Brazil for first place in Latin America in potential richness. The country's natural riches are legion and unlimited, and embrace minerals, mineral oil, vast forest areas and all types of agricultural land—in short, most of the potential blessings a country can possess.

Whatever may be the purely material obstacles impeding the swift development of these resources—and material obstacles will not in the long run be unsurmountable—real progress can only be registered in direct ratio to the advance of enlightenment and of general and technical education of the masses.

The government, fully realising that, without the latter, the organisation necessary for progress in any of these fields cannot be attained, has recently embarked on an ambitious campaign of public education, which, even if it only partially achieves its aims, should in the course of time contribute tangibly to the country's advancement in many respects other than the mere reduction of illiteracy. And so it has not been mere chance that the budgets for education during the last ten years have topped those of every other Ministry, or that General Tomás Sánchez Hernández, one of the army's most dynamic, capable and cultured soldiers, was nominated Assistant Secretary of

Education in January 1944, in the middle of the war, and on the eve of Mexican active participation in it. At the present time no one can say when Mexico will attain such and such an output of a given commodity. The date will probably be too far off to be predictable; one can only shrug and refer to the Ministry of Education. And most intelligent Mexicans would, in fact, do just that.

Mexico is an extremely mountainous country, so mountainous indeed, that it is said that only in the south-east, in the flat Peninsula of Yucatán and the adjoining States of Campeche and Tabasco, can one find oneself out of sight of a mountain. I am able to confirm this from my own experience, although there are extensive desert areas in the north (in Chihuahua and Sonora) that I have not visited.

If I may be forgiven for attempting the ungrateful task of describing a country's topography, I would venture for Mexico the following superficial description:

From the long United States border southwards the land rises slowly, increasing in altitude as it converges with the narrowing coast-line. The edges of the table-land thus formed gradually crystallise into immense mountain ranges, and leave a low-lying coastal strip on either side of the plateau they enclose. In the southerly State of Oaxaca the two mountain fringes meet in a knot, known as Zempoaltepetl, from where the land descends abruptly eastwards to the narrow Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Here the maximum altitudes are not comparable with those of the main plateau. Farther east is another *massif*, that of Chiapas, which joins up with the adjacent Guatemalan Highlands.

The two fringes of the central plateau are known as the Sierra Madre Oriental (on the eastern side) and the Sierra Madre Occidental. The latter becomes the Sierra Madre del Sur in the States of Guerrero and Oaxaca, when its axis is more pronouncedly west-east than north-south.

The two fringes are unequal in their abruptness. The eastern one is more spectacular, and a descent westwards from the central plateau entails a less startling drop to the Pacific coast. This lack of symmetry, and factors such as the prevailing winds, jointly cause a great divergence of temperature, humidity and

rainfall. The eastern slopes of the plateau are endowed with a much damper climate, and consequently with a more luxuriant vegetation, than their western counterparts, which for a part of the year are insufferably torrid. The whole length of the coastal strip on both sides is of course tropical, and in the northern part of the country the high desert regions, with a minimum rainfall, are frequently uninhabitable owing to the intensity of the dry heat and lack of water.

On the Meseta Central, typified by the wide valley in which the capital lies, the climate is superficially very pleasant indeed. Its basic healthiness, however, is a question on which there is some disagreement. The German Foreign Office for some years before the war considered Mexico City an unhealthy diplomatic post for purposes of leave classification, but the Germans were, I believe, alone in this respect. More recently, after resident foreign medical opinion had been consulted, there have been indications that the United States State Department and our own Foreign Office may decide to classify it similarly, on the grounds that a prolonged stay at such an altitude tends in many cases to bring about in the foreigner a tension in the nervous system and other complications. But it would be an exaggeration to suggest that this is universal, and many foreigners whose hearts are sound, feel perfectly fit, even after prolonged and uninterrupted residence.

Around 2,000 years ago an unknown civilisation settled down here, as is proved by a highly individual archæology which can be studied at such places as Zacatenco, Copilco and Tlatilco—all near the capital. Some time in the first millennium, the Toltecs, and what is known as the Teotihuacán civilisation settled at Tula, and at Teotihuacán, which have climates similar to that of Mexico City. Later came the Chichimecs, and around 1350, the Aztecs, ostensibly influenced by the sight of an eagle on a cactus killing a serpent, ceased their wanderings at a spot which became known as Tenochtitlán, and later as Mexico City. They all came from the arid north, and one suspects that the relatively attractive climate of the Meseta may well have played some part in deciding all these peoples to settle down where they did.

In this part of Mexico, seasonal differences are not very

great, either from the point of view of temperature, or from that of the length of the days. The months of December and January are the coolest, and though at that time the night temperatures are often not far above zero, it is never really cold by northern European standards, and central heating is a rarity. From late May until early October is the rainy season, and during these months the rain falls, or is supposed to fall, with monotonous regularity for about two hours every afternoon. My personal experience of climate in various parts of the world, however, is that it rarely justifies its reputation, and in the case of Mexico City the regularity of the rain during the wet seasons of 1944 and 1945 was considerably less than in the preceding years, which were regarded as normal. I have only known it to rain twice in the morning in Mexico City. Generally speaking, all the year round the city is bathed in warm sunshine until about two p.m., and the temperature as a rule is not much higher than that of a fairly warm English summer day.

Tropical clothes are not worn on Mexico's high plateau. In 1943 a secretary was sent out from England to the British Embassy for me. The authorities concerned with arranging his passage had never sent anyone to Mexico City before, and when he asked for advice on the subject of kit, someone glanced hastily at an atlas and replied: "Well, it's in the tropics, so you had better buy white drill suits." Luckily this unwise advice was never followed, as at that time clothes were not easy to obtain in a hurry in England, and my secretary left without his full complement of equipment.

I do not propose to write at any length about Mexican history; many historians and others have covered the subject more than adequately. In order, however, that the significance of certain things in modern Mexico, whether concrete or abstract, architectural or political, may be the more easily understood, it is as well mentally to divide Mexico's history into four periods.

The first is the pre-Conquest, pre-Cortésian, pre-Hispanic or pre-Columbian period, all of which expressions are used to cover the era from the dawn of time in Mexico until 1519, when Hernán Cortés finally destroyed the power and independence of the fantastic Aztec Empire. Much is now known about

pre-Cortésian history, but there are still enormous lacunæ which archæological and anthropological studies are yearly filling in.

Next is the Colonial Era, from 1519 to 1810, during which what is now called Mexico was known as La Nueva España, and was a viceroyalty of the Spanish Empire, governed with a varying degree of adequacy or mediocrity by a series of Viceroys appointed by the Spanish Crown. Mexico was probably the richest of all Spain's possessions in the New World. During this period the country was christianised, civilised, developed and exploited, and the forebears of the majority of the population of to-day (the *mestizos*, known in other parts of Latin America as *ladinos*), came into being, as the result of wholesale miscegenation between the European colonists and the Indian inhabitants of the country.

The Republic follows, from 1810 to 1910. From Independence onwards this was a stormy and unprogressive period, featuring almost constant violence, rebellion and revolution, which finally gave way to a period of peace, which had as its main characteristics a general development of the country, prosperity for the fortunate few, and oppression for the less fortunate many, under General Porfirio Díaz.

The last period covers the Revolution and the post-revolutionary period of (Republican) retrenchment, from 1910 until the present time. In 1910 the Madero revolution against Porfirio Díaz broke out, and the Revolution proper continued with violence until around 1922. The twenty-four ensuing years as stated above are also referred to as "The Revolution" (for modern Mexico, the Revolution is still a living reality), but there have been no serious disturbances in the country for the last fifteen years, and recent presidents have devoted themselves to progress and development, each in his own particular way.

According to the last census (1942), Mexico's population totalled 20,625,826. The racial classification of the population is approximately 10 per cent white (or *criollos*), 70 per cent *mestizos* and 20 per cent Indians. Such a classification, however, is of necessity approximate and arbitrary, and there must be a large number of borderline cases. For



Popocatepetl's peak at dawn.  
View from the slopes of Ixtaccíhuatl.



*Top.* Scene in a typical Indian market. (Huauchinango, State of Puebla.)

*Below.* The "Chinampas" in the Valley of Mexico, near Mixcuic.  
(page 20)

example, the line of demarcation between a pure Indian and a predominantly Indian *mestizo* cannot but be vague, as there are people classifiable by some standards as Indians who no longer speak their own language and to whom, in consequence, no philological criterion is applicable. It is noteworthy, however, that the reverse does not apply. No one in Mexico learns an Indian language artificially, except a few employees of the Office of Indigenous Affairs, and an occasional school-master.

The *criollos*, or people of pure Spanish ancestry, are, logically, usually to be found in the towns, engaged in Government business or whatever it may be. The agrarian reforms dispossessed the majority of the *hacendados* or large estate owners, and consequently fewer of this class now live in the country than formerly. The colour of one's skin, however, is no bar to individual progress, and there are any amount of *mestizos* in high places in the Government. Three of the most prominent public figures of Mexico in the last twenty years are *mestizos*—General Amaro, General Cárdenas and Licenciado Ezequiel Padilla. Pure Indians perhaps come to the forefront with less frequency, but Juárez, Mexico's reformer-hero of the last century, was a full-blooded Zapotec, and at the present time there are a few Indian generals in the Mexican army.

With the exception of the Maya Indians of Yucatán (who conservatively adhere to their own Mayan names), everybody in the country uses Spanish Christian names and surnames, irrespective of race. But the surnames in use have hardly the wide variety of those found in Spain. Whilst in Spain the use of one's mother's name in addition to that of one's father, if arbitrary, is habitual, the relative paucity of surnames in Mexico has increased the desirability of the custom. A glance at any official list of persons shows that about 90 per cent of the populace use both names. Some years ago the army passed a regulation obliging all personnel to do so, to avoid confusion; when it is realised that in 1943 no fewer than twenty-six Mexican generals were alive, whose patronym was González, the necessity for such a step is apparent. Names such as García, Martínez, Rodríguez, López and Sánchez are almost as



common. These people are the Smiths, Jones and Browns of Mexico. The explanation lies in the fact that during the period of christianisation of the Indians, the converts usually adopted the first Spanish surname suggested to them by the missionaries, or by the owner of the hacienda on which they eked out their serfdom.

As if to make up for the deficiencies of surnames, the Mexicans have let themselves go where Christian names are concerned. Not only are all the normal Spanish Christian names *de rigueur*, but such high-sounding specimens as Leodigario, Donaciano, Espiridión, Heliodoro and Epigmenio are by no means uncommon. Mexico is a Catholic country, but I fear that a conscientious hagiologist would be hard put to it to identify some of these names with any known Christian saint. It is something of a shock to meet an illiterate Indian who solemnly pronounces a mouthful of this sort when asked his name. I recall a Zapotec mule-boy who once accompanied me on a week's trip in the mountains of Oaxaca. He rejoiced in the name of Epifanio Martínez Monteverde, and was known to his intimates as "Pif"!

A glance at a large-scale map of Mexico is most informative from the point of view of place-names. The general trend is, that with the notable exception of the Yaqui and adjacent regions of Sonora (in the north-west), the majority of place-names in the country north of the meridian,  $21^{\circ}$  N., are Spanish, indicating that these regions were not inhabited by Indian populations of great importance or durability at the time of the Conquest. In the Yaqui area names such as Topolobampo, Machipaco, and Huatabampo are a testimony that the Yaquis did not conform. They were, and are, an extremely virile race, even though their numbers are now very limited. (They might be termed the Zulus of Mexico.)

South of latitude  $21^{\circ}$ , to speak in general terms, nearly all places where there was a settlement at the time of the conquest have retained their original names, though in many cases these are now preceded by those of Christian saints. The indigenous names are in a variety of languages, though Nahuatl (of which Aztec, or "Mexicano", is a form) predominates, proving the ascendancy in former times of the

Nahuatl-speaking peoples over a wide area. Nahuatl names, as a matter of fact, are found throughout Central America as far south as Nicaragua, partly owing to early migrations from Mexico of peoples speaking this tongue (e.g., in El Salvador), and partly owing to the fact that the Spanish Conquistadores in that region were accompanied by military forces from Tlaxcala in Mexico, who spoke Aztec (e.g., in Guatemala).

The Aztec names around Mexico City are often rather frightening, and not easy for the foreigner either to pronounce or to remember. They contain a profusion of "tl's", "hu's" and "x's". Mexico's famous twin volcanoes—Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl ("Smoking Mountain" and "White Woman" respectively)—are samples with which the foreigner can rarely cope at the beginning. There are, incidentally, suburbs of Mexico City rejoicing in the tongue-twisting names of Tlalnepantla and Tlaltelolco.

In their logical areas, Tarascan, Otomi and Mayan names will be found in profusion on the map, each with an entirely different character, though distinguishable one from the other after a little experience. But it is noteworthy that such important Indian peoples as the Zapotecs, Mixtecs and Totonacs permitted many of their settlements to be called by Aztec names, though the Aztec language was to them a foreign tongue.

A consolation to the foreigner is that, in Spanish at least, all these foreign names are pronounced phonetically. Consequently one is rarely involved in the difficulties which beset the foreigner in England, who is liable to waste valuable time interrogating a native before he finally realises that Beaulieu is "Byuli", or that Cirencester is more easily recognisable as "Sisister".

As the Mexican nation of to-day consists of two utterly different ethnic groups, together with the result of their fusion over some 400 years, it will be evident that it is not easy to define the Mexican type or character in one sentence. A thorough analysis fails to reveal very much similarity between the *criollo* and the pure Indian, which types constitute the extremities of the body we are examining. (There are also distinct differences between the northerner and the southerner in general.) As it would be futile to undertake a separate

analysis for each of the three elements (which merge into one another), let us try to generalise. Perfectly logically, Spanish and Indian traits mingle to form one cohesive amalgam which applies to the majority of the populace, and they are to a varying degree present or absent, as the case may be, in the white and Indian minorities.

The first thing that strikes the foreigner (and it strikes him all the more forcibly if he knows Spain), is the softness and musical quality of Mexican speech. I am an intense admirer of Castilian, its euphony, its sonorous quality and its virility of enunciation; Mexican Spanish is considered by philologists one of the purest forms of the language spoken in America, and consequently I feel that there should be nothing derogatory in comparing it with classical Castilian. The Spanish spoken in Mexico is more soothing and less violent than that of Spain, and almost certainly costs less effort to speak. The cadence, and what we might call the "sleepy" quality of Mexican Spanish, seem to depend to some extent on the skin-colour of the speaker, the least energetic diction being that of the Indian. Indeed, the Indian's intonation of Spanish is as different from Castilian as chalk from cheese. The vowels seem inordinately lengthened, and the Indian's whole manner of speaking is redolent of what one can only describe as a sad wistfulness, as though his whole being were impregnated with a resigned disillusionment as to the lot of his people since the Conquest. This characteristic is less noticeable in the speech of the educated white Mexican.

One immediately recognises the visitor from Spain, apart from the two obvious criteria of his pronunciation of the "Zetas" and the "Elles". One has only to watch his mouth. Compared with the Mexican mouth, it strikes me as putting in about twice as much work to say the same thing.

But apart from the musical quality of Mexican Spanish, there is something else in Mexican speech which has a definite bearing on the national character. The Mexican is essentially soft-spoken, in the sense of the vocabulary he uses. Strong and indecorous words which, in Spain, are in common everyday use, are either not understood in Mexico, or reserved for very great emergencies, such as the one that presents itself

when one has partaken too freely of the national drinks, *pulque* or *tequila*.

A much-told anecdote illustrates this. The inhabitants of Puerto Alvarado, a small fishing port on the Vera Cruz coast, are reputed to be the most foul-mouthed community in the country. Not long ago a President of the Republic, accompanied by his Señora, went there for some official ceremony. A local inhabitant was heard to refer to the First Lady of the Republic in terms which would be distinctly unflattering by any standards. But in Mexico the expression used was a positive outrage; in Spain it is doubtful whether it would have caused very much comment. The outcome is not divulged in the anecdote, but in any case it is irrelevant.

This soft-spokenness is in no way paradoxical, for of all Mexican characteristics that one could enumerate, the most noticeable is the universal desire not to give offence. This applies to all classes, but perhaps most of all to the Indian. The Mexican consequently is almost invariably courteous, whether he is dealing with a stranger, an acquaintance or a friend. This is a pleasing trait, but to my mind it has a disadvantage. It is apt to "lead one up the garden path". Rather than cause offence by not agreeing to a proposal, or by not acquiescing to a request, the Mexican will often say "yes" when he means "no", and the foreigner is frequently upset when the "no" is abided by, and not the "yes". Mexicans hate scenes or arguments, and will do a lot to avoid an issue. One could cite innumerable cases of servants who prefer to leave their employment the easy way, that is, by avoiding the issue with their employers, and merely take French leave. This tendency applies equally well to business and social life.

Mexico is referred to *ad nauseam* as a "timeless land". Certainly time is not valued as greatly there as, for example, in the United States or in Europe. The rural population has no need to hustle, but I think it is fair to say that in Mexico the rural attitude to time and its value has universal acceptance. It is difficult to achieve things in a hurry, even in ultra-modern Mexico City, and Mexicans do not appreciate being chivied around impatiently by *extranjeros*. If this method should unwisely be adopted, rudeness on the part of the Mexican concerned

need not be expected, but little will be achieved, and the impression will doubtless be given that the foreigner himself is rude, barbarous and inexplicable. Educated Mexicans fully realise that some foreigners place a value on punctuality which is different from their own. As it happens, I am an extremely punctual person, and to be kept waiting is one of the things I dislike most in life. My Mexican acquaintances and friends, whilst often paying tribute to my *puntualidad inglesa*, rarely attained my own standards, and I soon asked myself "why in Heaven's name should they?" Nevertheless, *puntualidad* is striven after with some success by the younger generation of officers of the Mexican army. One efficient major whom I knew well, in order to have a dig at me, once claimed good-humouredly that *puntualidad de Estado Mayor* (General Staff punctuality) was every bit as good as the variety for which the Englishman has a traditional reputation.

My wife had a maid in Mexico City who had a considerable sense of humour. She would occasionally announce, with a laugh, that dinner would be served "*en cinco minutos, hora mexicana*". This, we knew, meant a quarter of an hour. It was obvious that Teresa realised the difference between the conception of time of her countrymen and that of foreigners.

The Mexican, being polite, is usually most formal on meeting, and the description of Mexican polite conversation, given by Madame Calderón de la Barca in her famous book written in 1843, *Life in Mexico*, still applies to some extent. "*Para servirle a Vd.*", "*A sus órdenes*", and other similar expressions of willingness to oblige one, are invariably part of such a conversation. The Indian indulges in this less, for, although he is usually the quintessence of courtesy, he tends to be sparing of words, if not to be definitely phlegmatic.

Mexican hospitality, much as in Spain, varies in accordance with whether one is in the country or in town. In the country the hospitality is generally greater, but there are exceptions. Some Indians may be influenced by mistrust of anyone who does not speak their own language, general shyness *vis-à-vis* the stranger or a basic racial dislike of any non-Indian (who may exploit them) and one will consequently not be overwelcomed as their guest.

Another noticeable characteristic is the innate quietness and dignity of the Mexican. Compare a market in Mexico with its counterpart in any European country, and this becomes more than evident. In a purely Indian market the silence strikes one as almost deathly, and how infinitely more dignified and colourful is such a gathering, than any similar congregation of individuals intent on selling things in Europe! The Indian market-woman never shouts in order to obtain customers. She squats impassively by the side of whatever she has to sell (if it is fruit, it will be symmetrically arranged one on three) with an aloof "take it or leave it" attitude, though she will reply quietly and courteously, if spoken to, assuming that she speaks Spanish. In point of fact, in many cases she really does not mind whether she sells her wares or not. I heard of one Indian market-woman who was very reluctant to oblige a shopper who wished to buy everything she had, because, as she explained, she would then have nothing else to sell and the rest of her day would be empty.

In referring to the quietness and dignity of Mexican markets, I must make an exception. The capital of the republic strikes me as being the noisiest city I have ever known, and markets there are neither quiet nor dignified. Only their rather dilute colourfulness remains to enchant the newcomer.

And as if to ensure that the high standard of paradox in Mexico should be maintained, the enormous crowds that completely fill the capital's vast Plaza de la Constitución on the evening of every 16th of September, when the country's Independence anniversary is celebrated, are most subdued and orderly. The only noise is the sporadic letting-off of fire-crackers, which harmless, if cacophonous, pastime is dear to the heart of all Mexicans and which is indulged in whenever there is any excuse whatever for celebrating. The only theory I can offer to explain the lack of other noise is that these 16th-of-September crowds consist mainly of countryfolk who come in for the occasion.

The educated Mexican is usually possessed of an eloquence which is entirely Latin. Oratory forms an important part of the University syllabuses, and the results justify this. In general, the farther away one gets from the "white class", the

less eloquence one can expect, until one may just state baldly that the Indian is not eloquent. Licenciado Padilla is probably the most eloquent public figure in present-day Mexico; he has been put to the test at several International Conferences, and has emerged with flying colours. He is a magnificent artist in oratory, and never reads his speeches, or refers to notes. I have heard him improvise on occasion, and the result was, to say the least, impressive. Many other *políticos* and legal men have this same gift, to a lesser extent, but it is surprising how many important people in Mexico adopt the unworthy habit of reading their speeches, and worse, of reading them badly. Spanish lends itself well to magniloquence, and although many of these read speeches are fine in conception, their merits are utterly lost by the delivery.

Mexico's military past proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the Mexican in general is brave, tough and capable of the greatest heroism. Some heroic epics in her history are due to deep patriotic fervour, whilst others can be attributed only to a dogged indomitable spirit, at the back of which is perhaps nothing more than a desire for self-preservation, or allegiance to a local gunman or *político*, without the higher inspiration generally born of patriotism. The former is repeatedly exemplified by glorious exploits in the wars against the French and the Americans in the last century, the most brilliant example being the refusal to surrender of the cadets of the Military College, when United States forces in overwhelming numbers were besieging the Castle of Chapultepec. The latter finds examples without number during the Revolution, when incredible feats of bravery, resistance and self-abnegation were enacted on both sides, and when the cause being fought for could often hardly be described as glorious.

From 1942 to 1945 numerous Mexicans serving in the U.S. forces acquitted themselves with great heroism under fire, both in Europe and in the Pacific. Mexico's own Expeditionary Force, consisting of Squadron 201 of her air force, operated no less creditably on the Philippine front whilst it was in action there.

But the Mexican is fatalistic, and values life cheaply, and there is a seamy side to his bravery which it is not altogether

easy to understand. I refer to the violence, homicide and murder rife among the lower classes. This aspect of Mexican life is to some extent reflected all over the Republic, irrespective of altitude or of race, but I am referring particularly to Mexico City, because I lived there. A regular perusal of the police news in the metropolitan press leaves an appalling impression. We are informed that Chicago's crime record is considerably worse, but, for those who do not know Chicago, the bad impression remains, even though anyone who lives in Mexico's residential quarters sees nothing of this side of life, and is not affected by it.

Homicide in Mexico City, whether by cold steel or by firearms, could be mainly attributable to one of three factors, but, more likely, to a combination of them all. Official opinion appears to regard this scourge as largely caused by the effects of the national drinks *tequila* and *pulque*, taken in immoderate quantities, or indirectly to the narcotic *marihuana*. The latter is taboo, and legislation is undertaken to reduce drunkenness caused by *tequila* and *pulque*, but the results are not very far-reaching.

The other possible causes are, in the view of many people, some inherent neurotic instability in the *mestizo* which is ineradicable and which may be accentuated by intoxication, and the general effect on the nerves of Mexico City's altitude.

The most likely explanation is that all these factors are linked up. Certainly the impassive dignified Indian, at whatever altitude he may live, is occasionally converted into a raging beast, into the antithesis of his normal self, by alcohol, and it seems logical that this trait should be continued, if not even accentuated, in some *mestizos*, and be further magnified by the effect on the nerves and constitution generally of Mexico City's location. This is conjecture, for I have not consulted a psychiatrist on the subject. The only factual evidence I can offer is that there is more crime up on Mexico's high plateau than lower down, and that one notices in oneself a certain shortening of the temper (not attributable to the liver) after a prolonged stay at that altitude.

To conclude, it may be added that Mexicans in general are incurious of foreigners, not too well informed on, or concerned



about, world affairs, intensely politically-minded (except the Indians), and not greatly interested in those parts of their own country beyond their immediate sphere of action. The more advanced frequently display an apathy towards, and a contempt for, the Indian part of the populace, referring to Indians by the disparaging term of "*Inditos*". Few Mexicans, I feel, will disagree with me when I venture the opinion that this attitude is one which the Ministry of Education is called upon to handle, and that if the present tremendous educational programme in Mexico can be carried through with even fifty per cent success, such a philistine and limited outlook will soon be considerably less in evidence.

I have said nothing until now specifically about Mexican women, for I feel that much of the foregoing applies equally well to them as to their menfolk. I find it difficult to fathom the tendency among British writers in the last century to criticise Mexican men in the strongest terms while attributing all the virtues to the women. It looks as though the contacts on which these rather sweeping opinions were based were too superficial for any adequate assessment of the qualities of either sex.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MEXICO D.F.

THE city we call Mexico City is usually known as "Mexico, D.F." in Spanish, and the "x" is a guttural, without the "ks" value. "D.F." stands for Distrito Federal, for the area around the capital is federal territory, and is not administered by any of the adjacent states.

I feel that Mexico, D.F., deserves a chapter to itself, not only because there is a good deal to say about it, but also because, though in Mexico, it is not altogether Mexico, and because it is a city of sharp contrasts and surprising paradoxes.

On the other hand I have grave misgivings that if a description of such a thing as a large city is to be at all informative, it is likely to resemble extracts from a guide-book in style and monotony. I therefore apologise in advance for any stylistic shortcomings in this respect.

There is no reason why anyone of reasonable adaptability who is free from cardiac trouble, should dislike Mexico City as a place of residence, and I look back with considerable pleasure on the period I spent there. The materialist has small reason to complain of the lack of any of those things that make life pleasant, be it food and drink, night-life or golf-courses—and the æsthete is catered for by the climate, the many subjects to which he can, and perhaps should, devote himself, and all those factors which, lumped together, are usually referred to as "atmosphere" and "colour".

Hernán Cortés's first glimpse of the Valley of Mexico (the "Anahuac" of the Aztecs) was the most theatrical view possible.<sup>1</sup> Not only that, but the almost unbelievable developments of the previous few months must have contributed to making the moment a thrilling one even for such a brilliant, and perhaps prosaic, materialist as Cortés. He and his men had been the

<sup>1</sup> According to the journalist-historian Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the first white man to see the valley was one of Cortés's captains, Diego de Ordáz, who was sent on a reconnaissance, and whose first glimpse of it was from near the summit of Popocatepetl.

centre, and the heroes of one of the most fantastic adventures written in any chapter of the world's history—this man and his handful of "crusaders" had either dominated or made allies of all the Indians between the coast and the Sierra Nevada—the high range of mountains which skirts the Valley of Mexico on the east (and of which Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl form part).

Some time late in 1519, Cortés and his compatriots and allies, including Totonac Indians from the coast, and Tlaxcalans and Cholulans from the plain of Puebla, came into the Valley of Mexico over the saddle between these two volcanoes. This pass, now known as the Paso de Cortés, is at a height of between 12,000 and 13,000 feet. It is sometimes above the clouds and, when there are no clouds, it dominates the wide flat valley which stretches west and north-west, the opposite walls of which being so far distant as to be a vague blur even on the clearest day.

The city of Tenochtitlán, which the Conquistadores beheld in 1519, was constructed on an artificial island in the lake that then almost covered the valley floor, and it was joined to the lake's banks at at least three points by long causeways. The sheet of water was of very irregular outline, and was generally referred to as four separate lakes (Xochimilco, Texcoco, Xaltocan and Zumpango, from south to north), but they merged into one another. To-day only a shrunken Lake Texcoco (the central portion, to the east of Mexico City) can be said to be a lake, and Xochimilco, the southernmost section, is best described as a network of canals divided by what were originally floating islands—the canals being called in Aztec *chinampas*.

The view from the Paso de Cortés or from Popocatepetl, must have been breathtaking. But it is not given to many people to come upon Mexico City for the first time in this way. In the 1940's many visitors arrive by air, and the impression is less dramatic. Until recently most Europeans used to come by rail from the Port of Vera Cruz. This journey is not without a theatrical effect, as one is very conscious of the steep and stupendous climb from the tropical coastal belt up to the plateau, but the last stages of the journey are an anticlimax, as the railway meanders around to the north in order to avoid

the last mountain barrier, and finally enters the valley on the level and through its least spectacular entrance. My own arrival was effected in the least exciting way of all, for I went by rail from the United States. This journey involved a very gradual climb from Laredo, Texas, to the Mexican capital. It takes some twenty-six hours to accomplish, if the train runs to time.

Mexico City's altitude, to be precise, is 7,244 feet above sea level—more than three times that of Madrid. Numerous writers have said of Madrid that its height has a curiously oppressive effect, in that the sky seems to hang low. I have never noticed this in Mexico City, nor, I believe, is it apparent in the Latin American capitals which are at a still greater altitude, Bogotá and La Paz. In fact one does not feel "oppressed" in Mexico City at all—one may well feel a lassitude and a certain lack of energy, owing to the rarity of the atmosphere, but it is an altogether different sensation.

The valley is dead flat and, particularly in the south-eastern corner, it has curious flat-topped features which were once islands rising steeply out of the lake. Three wooded mountain ranges rise abruptly from the valley bed—the Sierra Nevada to the east, the Ajusco range to the south, and the Sierra de las Cruces to the west. To the north is an isolated range of rather steep naked hills, called the Sierra de Guadalupe. The snow-capped famous twin volcanoes to the south-east dominate the panorama majestically during the period of the year when visibility is good. Ajusco, a smaller volcano, seems to be very near to the south, and the outline of the Sierra de Guadalupe can always be seen from the city streets, unless it is actually raining. None of the peaks is now an active volcano, though we are told that Popocatepetl was still in eruption at the time of the Conquest.

I have read somewhere that the scenery of the Valley of Mexico is startlingly unlike anything else in the world. This is perhaps a slight exaggeration, but the scene is certainly distinctive. The *maguey* plants, gaunt and forbidding, are the nearest approach to hedges. The pepper tree, called *Arbol del Perú*, offers the only really verdant green. The poorer villages are predominantly adobe, comfortless, and rather unpre-

possessing. One remembers best those many dry sunny days when the earth seems parched, when the dust from the rapidly evaporating Lake Texcoco is beating across the landscape, when spiral dust-storms form and disintegrate every few minutes, and when nevertheless the atmosphere is limpidly clear and the mountains are visible on two or three sides, dominated by "Popo" and "Ixta", as they are affectionately called. And yet even this mental picture is not all-embracing, for at the southern end of the valley, around what remains of Lake Xochimilco, is a stretch of twelve or fifteen miles of lush poplar-bordered canals on whose banks grow most of the metropolis's fruit and vegetables. At one quiet, sleepy village called Mixcuic, it is almost necessary to pinch oneself to realise that this is indeed Mexico. The scene seems more Dutch or East Anglian. And then one suddenly comes upon a canal, which leads straight towards Popocatepetl's gleaming white peak, and one is reassured. This particular combination of scenery is something unforgettable.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that Mexico City is not altogether Mexico, and I can best clarify this statement by stressing its contrasts and paradoxes. I apologise for the too frequent use of these words, but, as the Mexican says, "*no hay remedio*" (it is inevitable).

There is nothing left in Mexico City of the pre-Cortesian Tenochtitlán, except an Aztec pyramid in a suburb called Tenayuca, and such remains of that Empire as are unearthed periodically when the foundations of new buildings are laid or deepened. The Indian city was totally destroyed, as those who have read Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* will remember. The oldest buildings are consequently those that still remain of the first rebuilding during the Colonial period, and in the central area there are many fine examples of colonial architecture to dignify the scene. The Spaniards soon discovered in the district a porous volcanic stone called *tezontle*, and used it generously. It is a delicate pink in colour, and mellows with time into a pleasing roan shade. Some of the colonial churches are outstanding for their cupolas and elaborate façades, and many of the private houses of the same era have patios, balconies, and wrought-iron grilles (*rejas*) of artistic merit.

This venerable dignity contrasts with the modern residential and business portions of the city, and with the sordid slums, whose architectural style is ephemeral and nondescript, though probably "nineteenth century"; the new clean spacious avenues contrast with the narrow, dirty, but not so very old, alleys, and even more so with the conglomeration of adobe hovels which spring up mushroom-like on the perimeter of the city, calling themselves *colonias*; the flashy ultra-luxurious bars of the modern hotels contrast with the humble *cantinas* and with the 826 registered *pulquerías* which, according to the press, are the home of all the vice in the world.

But perhaps of all the contrasts the greatest is that presented by methods of transport. A seething mass of the world's most modern cars throngs the streets, and cheek by jowl with them, the impassive, humble Indian or near-Indian porter pads along on bare or sandalled feet, carrying anything up to a medium-sized wardrobe slung on his back by means of a leather thong (*mecapal*), the full weight of the load being taken on the forehead. This form of transport is still used for much of the moving work in Mexico City; the men are the direct descendants of the Aztec *tlamemes*, who before the Conquest transported everything, from dressed stones for the pyramids, to marine delicacies all the way from the coast to Tenochtitlán for the Emperors' kitchens. Their demands to-day are small, and their earnings minute.

Here, then, side by side, are manifestations of the fourteenth and twentieth centuries; logically, one of them must be an anachronism. In the smart streets of Mexico City perhaps it is the *tlameme* who is the obtrusive element, but in some other parts of the Republic I would venture the opinion that the reverse is the case.

There is probably no capital in the world where the traffic is more hectic than Mexico City. The relationship between the country's annual revenue and the capital represented by automobiles must be unique. The former, as published, is around 629,000,000 pesos (average 1942-43), and the latter has probably never been calculated, but it must be very considerable indeed. During the war, when rationing or virtual non-existence of fuel caused a reduction of civilian traffic in

every other capital of the world (with the possible exception of Caracas), this was not the case in Mexico City, where *gasolina* was available in unlimited quantities all the time, except for a fortnight, late in 1944, when the main oil pipeline from Poza Rica was out of commission, and rationing was introduced.

In common with many cities, Mexico City has a traffic problem that bids fair to grow progressively worse as the city grows, and as cars come within reach of more and more people. Mexico is enjoying a boom at present, and, in contrast to the United States, only a very small percentage of Mexicans at present own cars. Yet in 1945 there were 5,000 taxis alone operating in Mexico City! (The normal peace-time figure for London is 7,000.)

The staid and conservative British driver, when on a visit to the continent of Europe before the war, used as a rule to express disapproval of the driving habits of, for example, the French, and particularly of the Parisians. But Parisian driving is mild and colourless compared with the art of driving as practised in Mexico City. The new arrival, if he is to drive at all in the Mexican capital, is obliged to "do in Rome", and he very soon does so. If he happens to be from England, he is liable, on returning there, to have a lot of trouble with the police during the period in which he is endeavouring to readapt himself to home conditions. It is indeed surprising that the number of accidents in Mexico City is not greater than the statistics show, but this remark has been a familiar "bromidiom" for many years, applied by Englishmen to the French. The only logical deduction seems to be that the French and the Mexicans and many other non-English peoples have a gift which is denied to us, in that they can take risks with their cars and get away with them a greater number of times than we ourselves.

The noise of Mexico City traffic is deafening, and the stranger finds it highly paradoxical that the Mexican who normally is essentially quiet, patient and dignified, should, immediately he finds himself behind a steering wheel in his own capital, undergo a complete transformation and appear a most impatient, inconsiderate and highly strung individual. The

words "in his own capital" are intentional, for, curiously enough, out in the country one finds one's fellow-drivers courteous and helpful. Road-hogging on the national highways is non-existent.

In 1940 the population of Mexico City was 1,464,556, and showed an increase of 435,000 during the previous decade. The rate of increase is apparently going up, as Mexico, D.F., continues to spread out in many directions, the development being most rapid in the more salubrious residential areas to the west of the city. It is the third largest Latin American city (after Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro), and the eighth largest on the American Continent.

The old city, built in this case on the site of pre-Cortesian Tenochtitlán, forms a compact central core around which the newer areas have sprung up. About ninety per cent of the colonial architecture of the city itself is confined to this area, be it church, public building or private residence. With time, however, the city has grown to include such places as Coyoacán, San Angel, Tacubaya and Tacuba, which were formerly some distance away, and where fine examples of early colonial architecture are still standing. On the western fringe of the old city is the area of twentieth century would-be skyscrapers, of which there are now several, all housing offices.

Many of the remaining areas of the city are characterised by a nondescript profile, the nineteenth century or unclassifiable styles mingling sometimes unharmoniously with the ultra-modern. The most popular residential quarter is the Lomas de Chapultepec, a colony of spacious tree-lined avenues and attractive villas in their own gardens. This is about three miles to the west of the city, and is reached through the green belt called the Bosque de Chapultepec. It has fine views over the city, and, indeed, over the whole valley. The oldest house in the quarter is not more than twenty-five years old, and the twentieth century architects have since then let their inventiveness and imagination run wild. An architectural purist might take exception to many of the villas which are overloaded with moulded pinkish stucco decoration, which, I believe, is a degeneration of the so-called Californian style. If this unfortunately popular speciality has not the originality



of Gaudi's creations in Spain early in this century, the effect of blatant sham ornamentation is similar.

Immediately to the west of the city confines is the Bois de Boulogne of Mexico City, the Bosque de Chapultepec, dominated by the *Castillo* of the same name, built in the classical style late in the eighteenth century on the top of a small wooded hill. The setting is very lovely. Chapultepec is Aztec for "the mountain of grasshoppers", and in the fields a little farther to the west even now at certain times of the year, multi-coloured grasshoppers are so numerous as to constitute almost a plague.

The later Aztec emperors laid out a pleasure park at this spot. Cortés reported that Montezuma (Moctezuma, Muteczuma, Motecuzoma, Motacuzoma, Motehuzuma or however one may prefer to call him), was devoted to it, and had a second residence there. A spring on the hill conveniently provided the capital with its drinking water, which reached its destination across the undrinkable waters of the lake by an aqueduct. The vestiges of a later, colonial, aqueduct are still to be seen near the western end of the Avenida de Chapultepec. Mr. W. P. Robertson, writing in 1853, reported that 900 arches were then standing, but now only twenty-two remain.

One of the later viceroys caused the present castle to be built on the summit of the hill, and, after it had been reconditioned, the rather pathetic pair Maximilian and Carlotta made it their glittering home for the few short years they were to rule Mexico's destinies. Since then, occasional prominent visitors to Mexico have been housed there, but recent presidents, apparently for democratic reasons, have resided elsewhere. Late in 1944 President Manuel Avila Camacho inaugurated a new national museum of a predominantly colonial character in some of the castle's apartments, and the building's latest claim to fame is derived from the fact that in February, 1945, the Inter-American Conference on Matters of War and Peace made it its headquarters, and drew up a Charter for the American Republics which will be known to posterity as the "Acto de Chapultepec".

The Bosque de Chapultepec, if smaller than the Bois de Boulogne, is hardly less attractive, and certainly no less

popular. On Sundays it seethes with city dwellers, costumed *charros*,<sup>1</sup> and smart cars filled with joy-riders.

The most enchanting thing about the Bosque is, to my mind, the presence of large numbers of the *ahuehuete* tree (the *Taxodium mucronatum* of botany), a kind of giant American cypress. The Aztec word *ahuehuete* can be translated as "the never-ageing tree", and indeed the tree's longevity is such that most of the largest ones were probably already there when the Aztec emperors relaxed in the gardens.<sup>2</sup> The parasitical (or epiphytical) plant called in the United States "Spanish moss" (and in Mexico "*heno*") flourishes on these giants, and lends beauty to the scene, hanging in long grey festoons from every limb. *Heno*, to some extent, takes the place of holly and mistletoe in Mexico. Large quantities of it are gathered and brought into the markets in December, so that it can be draped on everything in the houses at Christmas time.

The light effects, as the strong sun penetrates the *ahuehuetes* and other trees in the Bosque, are often superlatively beautiful, and the troubled soul who is in need of quiet, beauty and solace should try out the effects of a morning walk along the many paths and avenues. A Sunday morning should not, however, be chosen if solitude is sought.

The relatively small seasonal variation in the Valley of Mexico tends to be monotonous, but it has the effect of prolonging the season of many of its characteristic non-tropical flowering plants. Indeed, some of these remain in bloom throughout the year.

The most outstanding flower in Mexico City, is, I think, the

<sup>1</sup> See page 31.

<sup>2</sup> There is a remarkable *ahuehuete* at the Indian village of Santa Maria de Tule not far to the east of the city of Oaxaca. It is popularly believed to be well over 1,000 years old, and to be the third or fourth largest tree in the world. Its trunk is so massive that it takes at least twenty people with outstretched arms to encircle it. Its height is also impressive and it completely dwarfs every building in the village, including the adjoining church.

*The Glasgow Geography*, dated 1819, states that the tree had been found to be 118 feet around the bole, but that in the view of a certain M. Anza, who had examined it closely, it was not a single individual, but three united trunks.

This is not the general view now, so presumably the last 125 years have perfected its camouflage.

*The Glasgow Geography*, a voluminous and little-known work published in Glasgow, contains very interesting and detailed contemporary information on Mexico, taking up some 125 pages of close print. It is not included in the list of British authors in the appendix, as the work is anonymous.

gladiolus. Gladioli in all conceivable colours are brought in from the Xochimilco district by the ton uninterruptedly and with no regard for the season.

Europeans soon notice the absence of any of the daffodil and tulip tribe. None of the bulbs that are extensively grown in Europe are known, though the deficiency is more than made up for by other species. Two of the more popular substitutes are the brilliant blue agapanthus (the Mexicans call it *agapanda*) and the fragrant pinkish tuberose (*nardo*—otherwise *Polyanthes tuberosa*). Both these are in bloom for many months each year.

I am far from being a competent botanist, and for some reason I had always mentally associated those three most ornamental plants—bougainvillæa, poinsettia and frangipani. All are overworked by English novelists as “props” for romantic, exotic settings (which may well explain my association of them), and all grow in Mexico.

Bougainvillæa (*bugambilia*!) grows strongly in the capital anywhere out of the wind, and covers walls and whole buildings with masses of variously coloured blossom. This is another plant which seems to disregard the seasons entirely.

The ostentatious blood-red poinsettias are at their best in December up on the plateau, and are used traditionally as Christmas decorations. The poinsettia is, in fact, known locally as *flor de Nochebuena* (Christmas flower).

The exotic, simple-flowered and sappy frangipani-tree (a species of *Plumeria*) is, however, too tropical for the meseta, and grows only at a much lower altitude. The most luxuriant growth of this beautiful species which I saw was a grove in deep-pink bloom on the Isla de Los Sacrificios, in the Gulf of Mexico, better known as a Totonac archæological site, and as a cemetery for French troops during the French campaigns in the country in the last century.

In the capital there is one annual botanical “event” that must be mentioned. This occurs in the month of March, when the *jacaranda*-trees are in bloom for about three short weeks, offering the most lovely sight in the city. Many avenues are planted with *jacarandas*, and during their blossom time they are a misty sea of delicate bluish-mauve.

At almost the same time, another flowering tree is dominating the countryside at lower altitudes. Generally called *flamboyant*, its leaves resemble those of an acacia, and its profuse blossom takes the form of arresting orange-red spikes.

Europeans are usually surprised that Mexico City, which, in spite of all paradoxes, is really a Latin city, has no outdoor or "pavement" cafés such as are the nucleus of almost all social life in Spain, France and other European Latin countries. The climate is considerably more suitable for this sort of establishment than it is in Paris, and one would imagine that the Mexicans, being leisurely folk, would find outdoor cafés a great attraction. One cannot help feeling that if the Pasco de la Reforma were provided with one or two cafés in the European style, such as those on Madrid's Gran Vía, or on Paris's Champs-Élysées, the café habit would very soon form an important aspect of social life in Mexico. It seems, however, that to date no one has attempted such a venture, and Mexico City has no pavement cafés at all. The only city in the country where I have found this type of café is Oaxaca.

In the last few years several chic restaurants with an international cuisine and high prices have opened and flourished, but there are few such places of traditional repute, and the majority of restaurants in the capital seem to have an ephemeral existence. In general, it must be said that restaurant food all over the country is indifferent.

One perennially amusing aspect of Mexican restaurants, and particularly of the superior ones, is the English version of the menu which frequently appears opposite the Spanish. This peculiarity is so pronounced, that one observant American visitor published an amusing article on the subject in *Vogue*. It would seem that the linguistic attainments of the local restaurateurs, or perhaps of the type-setters of the menus, are of a distinctly limited order, for as a rule the English menus contain translations of the "schoolboy howler" variety. If Americans find them strange, Englishmen would logically be even more at a loss, for the English current in Mexico is usually American English, and American word-meanings are accepted. But even allowing for the fact that what we call prawns, vegetable marrow, runner-beans and pigeons are, to

the American, shrimps, squash, string-beans and squabs respectively, the Mexican restaurateur, going on from there, proceeds to make things difficult to understand for the American with no Spanish, and often wellnigh incomprehensible for the Englishman who has not been in the United States. The best example I can recall is a dish labelled "Welsh Rovebit Beetle sandwich" in a restaurant in Guadalajara. The story ends here, for I cannot remember the ultimate identity of the delicacy.

Mexico City, normally one of the best shopping centres in Latin America, increased in relative excellence during the war years, owing to greater austerity elsewhere. Many things that were not to be had in the United States were available, and I can recall few that were unobtainable, if one were prepared to pay high prices. Exceptions were spare parts for cars, and such luxuries as photographic material, household electrical equipment and English shirting. But it was infinitely easier throughout the war to obtain English suitings and Scotch whisky in Mexico than in the United Kingdom! These things became genuine luxuries as prices rose, and the retail prices of motor-cars, all clothes, foreign drinks, and furniture soared between 1942 and 1945. The cost of living in general, and house rents in particular, rose by about a 100 per cent. Food also, even *frijoles* and maize, reached prices which caused definite hardship to the poor. Car tyres were rationed, and a flourishing black market was naturally organised. That infuriating word "priority", however, was seldom heard, and then generally only in connection with tyres and air passages. It may be said that the life of the city was little affected by the war, or by Mexico's declaration of war in May, 1942.

The department stores of the capital are mostly in French hands, and the innumerable grocers' shops nearly all belong to Spaniards. In Mexico, grocers' shops are known as *abarrotes*, and the word current in Spain, *ultramarinos*, does not signify anything. The Spanish grocers of Mexico are mostly energetic northerners from Asturias, and, having arrived before the Civil War, have no particular political axe to grind. If anything, the sympathies of the majority of them are now with the Franco régime, and they have little to do with the numerous

Republican and Communist refugees, who belong largely to the intellectual or artisan classes.

A comparison of the shop of a Spanish *abarrotero* with that of his Mexican counterpart is rather instructive. The Spaniard is extremely hard-working, and appears to have no interest in life beyond his business; his shop is full of goods, and he does a considerable trade. The Mexican is less fanatical about his business, keeps a very limited stock, and consequently has a relatively minute turnover. He seems to have little business instinct, but then he requires a good deal less to live on, and so he is content to let the *gachupín*<sup>1</sup> make all the going, expend all the energy, and earn all the money, while he continues on the even tenor of his untroubled, if somewhat penurious, way.

I have referred elsewhere to crime in Mexico City, and particularly to crime with violence. The resident very soon becomes aware of another brand of crime—petty theft, or less petty theft, in the form of burglary. Most writers on Mexico have been unable to avoid referring to this, for it is a positive art. I speak from experience, having lost the lamps from my car no fewer than seven times, in spite of having tried out various anti-theft devices. I finally found the right solution by soldering the last pair of lamps to the mudguards in such a way as to baffle all would-be thieves. I may add that I was luckier than various friends who lost in this way every interior fitting of their cars, including the radios.

The speed with which these people work is unbelievable. To leave one's car unlocked anywhere in Mexico City at any time of the day or night is to court losses, and the risks are much the same if one's car remains on the streets at night, locked, and in a brightly lit spot. This kleptomania does not apply only to cars, but to everything that is portable.

Once again the long-term answer lies with the Ministry of Education, but one cannot help feeling that a more rapid solution is not far out of reach. Mexico City's police force has never been adequately paid, either through definite inadequacy of funds or through the short-sightedness of the government of the Federal District. Most dwellers of Mexico

<sup>1</sup> Word used in Mexico to denote a Spaniard as opposed to the white *criollo* born in Mexico.

City will admit with disarming frankness that the force is inadequate and ill chosen, and some of my acquaintances have gone so far as to attribute more serious shortcomings to the police. Without wishing to corroborate this, I feel that the police, by virtue of their inadequate rates of pay, and by the absence of any form of idealism, are more or less obliged to live by *mordidas* (a word meaning "any form of bribery and corruption"), which has become a household expression applying by no means only to the police force, and which is almost a national joke. Successive senior military officers have been installed as chiefs of the police of the Federal District, with the avowed intention of "reforming", "purging" or "enlightening" the force, but they still have a long way to go in this highly desirable and very necessary crusade.

The majority of the objects stolen in the capital are popularly supposed to find their way to the large market known as "La Lagunilla", where every conceivable sort of article is obtainable, particularly on Sunday mornings. I made the acquaintance of this place in the first instance, as I had been recommended in all seriousness to seek my own missing lamps there. I did not find the lamps, but I found a host of other interesting things one sunny Sunday morning, from old books and paintings to colonial silver and even occasional archaic figurines.

One might say that the capital offers very good outdoor diversions, and rather mediocre indoor amusements.

On Sundays at most times of the year one can go to a *charro* meeting in the morning, to a bull-fight in the afternoon, and to the *Frontón* to watch Basque *pelota* in the evening. But if one does this one may miss a good race meeting or a first-class polo game, and will have to forgo one's golf, tennis, riding, or whatever other sport one usually practises.

Baseball, Association football and softball are very popular with the Mexicans, but appear to be less in demand as spectacles, "gates" being very small.

The bull-fights are the best in America, and there is a constant interchange of Mexican and Spanish *toreros*. Bull-fighting is so popular that there is at least one weekly paper devoted entirely to this sport, and the *Plaza de Toros* is usually entirely sold out on Sunday afternoons. I am not, however,

an *aficionado*, so I will not expand on this subject. My lack of enthusiasm for bullfighting was usually attributed, politely but firmly, by Mexican enthusiasts, to my ignorance of the finer points of the technique. A new bull-ring, claimed to be the largest in the world, was nearing completion in 1945.

The standard of *pelota* attained in Mexico is also high, in spite of the altitude and its effect on the heart. Not all the exponents of this spectacular and fascinating game are Spaniards, for a generation of Mexican enthusiasts is now growing up, and they are attaining standards enabling them to hold their own against the most seasoned Basques. Their main advantage presumably lies in the fact that, accustomed to the altitude of Mexico City, they have no climatic disadvantages to combat.

The *charro* displays referred to above are a purely Mexican institution. In various parts of the Republic, and particularly in the capital and in Guadalajara, *charro* organisations flourish for purposes of equitation and sociability, and possibly to some extent for the pleasures of sartorial display. The members of these societies are predominantly well-to-do people of both sexes, with their own stables. The horses, to which I shall refer later, are very highly trained, and often compare favourably with those remarkable animals formerly subjected to "dressage" at the Spanish school in Vienna and at Saumur's cavalry school.

The *charro* harness is of the most elaborate Mexican style, and the riders' costumes are picturesque and extravagant, comprising a colossal Mexican hat and, for the men at any rate, a suit with a short jacket and skin-tight trousers, all richly embroidered and of any colour scheme that pleases the wearer. The gala displays of the *charro* societies include lassoing steers and colts, equestrian acts such as those one sees in the circus ring, and a technique of steer-throwing by twisting its tail from the back of a horse, called *colear*.

Riding in the neighbourhood of Mexico City is particularly popular, and there are numerous civil clubs and military organisations which pay their tribute to the horse in this way. I have very pleasant memories of riding out on sunny mornings with Mexican army officers, and being invariably well



mounted on the excellent animals from the stables maintained for the use of the general staff.

The racing season is from October to March and the attractive course, called the Hipódromo de las Américas, is thronged each Sunday with a fashionable, gay and colourful crowd. The altitude appears to have little effect on the track time, though horses from the United States, or from any lower altitude, naturally require a period of acclimatisation and special training before they are entered.

Mexico is keen on polo, and there are numerous teams, both military and civilian. General Joaquín Amaro Domínguez, who was Mexico's Minister for Defence from 1925 to 1931, may claim to be largely responsible for the popularity of the game, as he introduced it originally into army circles. Each year now, there is a three-cornered international contest between the United States, Argentina and Mexico, and the standard of play is high.

Of indoor diversions, the cinema is undoubtedly the most popular, and Mexico's own film industry is attaining some importance, particularly in the Latin American market. There are about sixty cinemas in town, and they pay sufficiently well for new ones to be frequently opened. Drama is neglected, and the number of theatres is very small. A few mediocre houses offer variety and other forms of histrionic entertainment, but the gigantic National Theatre, called El Palacio de Bellas Artes, built at a cost of seven million gold pesos, eclipses them all both architecturally and in its scope. This establishment is run by the Ministry of Education, and is used for everything from concerts of the Mexican Symphony Orchestra to political and national rallies of all types, and from recitals of visiting musical virtuosos to occasional grand opera. The music-loving public, which is now quite numerous, can by no means, therefore, always count on being able to hear good music in Mexico.

The once flourishing red-light quarter, which was around the Calle de Cuauhtemotzín, has been purged to a considerable extent, though it would be absurd to say that there is no longer any prostitution in the city. Nowadays, however, the oldest profession in the world is carried on with a good deal of discretion, and men are rarely accosted on the streets.

The number of night clubs and similar establishments has increased in recent years, mainly owing to the large number of American tourists who flocked to the Mexican capital during the war. Prices in these places are high, and the cabarets, if any, mediocre.

In Mexican and diplomatic society the cocktail-buffet, which goes on until late, is more in vogue than the early cocktail parties preferred in many countries. This is in contrast with the custom in Central America, where the hostess invites her guests for six o'clock, and they leave about two hours later. In Mexico the average gathering of this sort will start around eight o'clock and break up only when all have drunk and eaten their fill, which may be at any time between ten o'clock and one in the morning.

The British colony in Mexico is now very much smaller than before our oil interests were expropriated in 1938. According to official statistics in 1930 there were then 4,632 British subjects in the country, but in 1945 the total was reduced to 1,512 adults, of whom 905 lived in the capital. Almost all are engaged in business. The colony is numerically about seventh on the list of foreign communities in Mexico. Without reference to statistics, I would say that the Spanish, Syrio-Libanese, Chinese, American, French and German Colonies exceed the British in numbers.

In the capital the main centres of British activity are the British Club, Christ Church, the Anglo-Mexican Cultural Institute (inaugurated by the British Council in 1944), and the Reforma Sports Club. Christ Church is Episcopalian, with an American Episcopalian minister, but the British Protestants have adopted it as their house of worship, even if it is not denominationally Anglican.

The small colony showed a magnificently patriotic spirit during the war. It managed to send 124 young men and woman to the forces, and raised, by every conceivable means, sums of money and clothing for about twenty-five distinct war charities. These achievements were out of all proportion to the colony's numerical strength.

Any criticism at all of the British community in Mexico would be the same as that levelled at most British communities

in foreign countries, namely, that they tend to be ultra-insular, and make insufficient effort to know or to understand the country in which they reside, or to fraternise with the people amongst whom they live. To every generalisation of this kind there are very numerous exceptions, and I hope that those of my many friends in the British colony in Mexico who may happen to read this will not wish to invite me to a duel. Most of us know in our innermost hearts that we are not such good mixers as we might be with people whose ways are not ours, but those who make an effort to overcome this, may I call it, idiosyncrasy, are unfortunately in the minority. One result of this is that Englishmen from Iceland to Angola, and from Chile to Moscow, are all too frequently considered enigmatic, retiring and stand-offish. In this world of shrinking distances, disappearing barriers, and intensified cultural and commercial relations, this reputation puts us at something of a disadvantage in the race for a place in the sun abroad. By way of illustration, it might be as well to mention the great measure of success achieved by the Germans in their conscious infiltration in Latin America until 1942. Their success was not all achieved by mixed marriages nor yet by Dr. Goebbels and the brilliant propaganda of the *Ueberseeabteilung* of the National Socialist Party, but to a very great extent by the German flair for adapting himself to his surroundings, for sharing the lives and interests of the people he lives among, and for making himself generally acceptable to them before starting out to "propagandise" them.

The number of Banking Houses and similar concerns operating in Mexico City is legion. There are over a hundred separate establishments of this category, of which the vast majority are national, as opposed to foreign, houses. The Bankers' Club, which is housed in splendour on the top of a modern office-building in the centre of the city, is the social rallying point of the numerous banking community and of other prominent business people. It is probably the most lavishly equipped and luxurious establishment in the whole country, but for any lover of "typical" Mexico, there is something about the Bankers' Club that irks. It is the quintessence of twentieth century capitalism, and the personi-

fication of everything that the Mexican scene, superficially at least, is not.

A curious aspect of business procedure in Mexico is the general use of agents for the collection of accounts. The most reputable houses, and even professional men, adopt this system, and no stigma attaches to it. Instead of sending accounts at intervals to customers, patients, or clients, as the case may be, firms doing credit business send a man around, who is liable to appear at one's house or office, and present the receipted bill, duly legalised with revenue stamps. This he is naturally only prepared to hand over on payment of the total sum outstanding. It is often disconcerting to be set on by these little men in the temporary absence of one's cheque book, and, as no invoices are sent out, the system has the added disadvantage of leaving one without any record of what one owes, for purposes of reference. It appears, however, that this system has proved itself the most effective one of assuring that credit arrangements are not abused.

Mexico being the land of the free *par excellence*, it is not surprising that the press has considerable freedom, and that newspapers have a wide range of political leanings. There are six main daily papers, ranging from the Leftist *El Popular* to the Government organ *El Nacional*, which is the least sensational and most reliable. There are also two dailies appearing in the afternoon and evening, each with several editions. Most of these rely on United States news agencies, and usually feature United States news and views to the exclusion of others. It must, I fear, be said that, during the war years, the British war effort generally had to take a back seat, and, intentionally or unintentionally, the Mexican reading public was given rather too modest an impression of our participation in the struggle.

But the most interesting side of the metropolitan press is perhaps illustrated by two avowedly pro-Fascist dailies known as *El Hombre Libre* and *Omega*, and a Catholic weekly magazine, *La Nación*, the views of which, to say the least, offer the strongest proof of Governmental tolerance and of the genuine freedom of the Mexican press. Their policy can best be described as destructive, and their common editor appears to aim at

criticism of everything for the sake of criticism. Their pro-Allied convictions are open to doubt, but their antipathy towards national policies and institutions of all types are more remarkable. On one occasion *La Nación* published a caricature of the Foreign Minister, Licenciado Ezequiel Padilla, on its front cover, with the highly unflattering and doubtless sincere heading: "El Laval de México," on the grounds that, at least according to the editorial, he was selling his country to the United States. It was understood that the Foreign Minister was quite unperturbed by this insult, and did not dream of suppressing the magazine, or of in any way assailing the freedom of the press, and, thereby, article 7 of the Constitution of 1917.

Mexico City has no less than twenty-five separate radio stations, but no important official transmitting station. Radio has adopted commercialisation, but it would be inaccurate to say that it has adopted the best aspects of the system. When the most stirring deeds in the world's recent history were being enacted, news was usually conveyed at a speed which made it difficult to comprehend. The reason for this became apparent at the end of the bulletin, when it was announced that the broadcast was by courtesy of some local brewery. The only words that were slowly and clearly enunciated were those extolling the quality of the brewery's products. The station XEW is one of the most powerful on the American Continent, and it is of a high order from the acoustic and engineering points of view.

Mexico City is now a good deal more accessible than was the case some years ago. The Pan-American Highway section from the United States frontier to the capital was completed in 1936, and is a magnificent first-class road throughout the whole of its 777 miles.

The three separate railway lines from the north, from Nogales (Arizona), and El Paso and Laredo (Texas), continue to bring numbers of American visitors, but nowadays a high proportion of the foreigners who arrive in the capital come by air, for Mexico City's Balbuena Civil Airport is one of the busiest on the continent. Clippers and smaller passenger planes arrive and depart at all hours of the day and night, and

their services link Mexico City with places in all directions. The rapid increase in air traffic, which it was possible to achieve even in war time, has been such, that the commodious passenger building is now inadequate for the volume of traffic it has to handle. The Mexican Government, which is confident of still greater expansion in the post-war years, is now having the airport's runways extended, and new ones laid down.

There are various local conditions and customs in Mexico City that demand a certain standard of adaptability from the newly arrived foreigner who sets up house there.

If the person concerned feels the cold, room will have to be made somewhere in the residence for considerable quantities of wood fuel for use in December and January, when the night temperatures are sufficiently low to warrant fires in the hearth. Coal is rarely used domestically, and is frequently quite unobtainable. In the winter months the wooded slopes of the surrounding mountain ranges are made to provide tremendous quantities of logs and of *ocote*,<sup>1</sup> an extremely resinous pine-wood, so resinous, indeed, that it can be used as a torch. This deforestation is practised to such an extent in the Sierra de las Cruces, the western wall of the valley, that in another few decades its slopes will probably be showing signs of the toll taken of them, and the climate of the valley may possibly be influenced in some way by the change.

Then there is the necessity for *agua electropura* for drinking purposes. The tap water is not considered drinkable, and the purified product is brought around at intervals in large glass demijohns.

The gas used for kitchen-stoves is supplied in a novel manner. The Mexico City authorities have never permitted subterranean pipe-lines to be laid, and gas is consequently delivered to private houses in cylinders of varying sizes, and connected direct to the stove-pipe. If, as occasionally happened during the war, the supplying company was temporarily out of stocks, it was just too bad, and one was obliged to forgo cooking until the situation could be rectified. The best solution was to obtain some charcoal and a standard charcoal burner, which

<sup>1</sup> Translated as "candle-wood" by Captain Lyon in 1828.

is in any case in general use for cooking small items by Mexico's poor and agricultural classes.

Then, as there are two separate competing telephone companies in the city, the subscriber who wishes to be able to communicate without difficulty with everybody is obliged to instal two separate instruments.

Few new arrivals will settle down without having their patience sorely tried by the happy-go-lucky attitude of such people as carpenters, plumbers and electricians. These people are universally grumbled at by the Mexicans themselves, who usually refer to their easy-going ways by the delightful word *informalidad*.

Finally, I have one small recommendation to make. Those who like a quiet life, and who live in any area of Mexico City where building is in progress—and this applies to most of Mexico's residential districts—would do well to chose May the 3rd for a visit to the country. This day is dedicated to the patron saint of the bricklayer, and is called either *El Día de la Santa Cruz* or *El Día del Albañil*. The usually quiet and unobtrusive bricklayer or stonemason lets himself go, and the day is rendered horrible for many people as he and his colleagues let off millions of crackers all over the city. Domestic pets become neurotic, and headaches assail their owners.

This love of pyrotechnics, or at least of their more simple varieties, is deep-set among the Indians and the *mestizos* of many countries of Latin America, and fire-crackers apparently cause them the greatest satisfaction. Rural religious ceremonies of any sort are incomplete without them in Mexico, and the habit is not only confined to that country. I have noticed the same flair for this pastime in Guatemala and Honduras.

It will, I hope, be felt from the foregoing that my earlier use of such words as "atmosphere", "colour", and "contrast" is fully justified when speaking of Mexico's capital. Those of our senses which have the strongest mnemonic effect are supposed to be the aural and the visual. For me such sounds as the gobbling of turkeys, the slapping of maize paste, as innumerable *tortilleras* fashion it into *tortillas*, the very insistent honking of motor-horns, and the rather melancholy Spanish of the *mestizo*, will always call to mind Mexico City. They

will mingle with such visual records as multicoloured gladioli and bougainvillæa, teeming markets, and the magnificent snow-capped peaks of "Smoking Mountain" and "White Woman" to invoke the pleasantest memories of life there.



## CHAPTER THREE

### OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: OAXACA AND SONORA

#### *Oaxaca*

THERE were four of us, five small mules and two Zapotec boys. I give the mules precedence over the boys intentionally, for we had been surprised to hear that they would cost us five pesos plus fodder each day, whereas Manuel and his cousin Epifanio Martínez Monteverde (whose mellifluous name was usually shortened to "Pif") expected only 3.50 pesos *per diem* for their services as guide and muleteer respectively.

At about 6.30 on a fresh November morning the party was assembled in a *corral* formed of organ-cactus in the Indian village of Mitla (Oaxaca), immediately before starting off on a pilgrimage into the mountains. Aided by Manuel's father, who owned the beasts, we were trying out saddles and stirrups and loading the pack mule in some haste, for at least ten hours of mountain route lay between Mitla and the remote hamlet which was to be the first night's stop. The party consisted of Anna and Stefan Dobrowolski, of the Polish Legation in Mexico City, Irwin Bullock, of Queens' College, Cambridge, and myself. Our steeds went by the names of Bocho, Chapulín (meaning "the grasshopper"), La Tonalteca, and Monja, respectively. The strong pack burro was apparently nameless. Manuel and Pif were to proceed *per pedes apostolorum* as is customary in such cases in Mexico.

An ambition I had long cherished was about to crystallise. Two years before, Bernard Bevan, an Englishman who is at once an inveterate explorer and a profound student of many things Mexican, had talked more than enthusiastically about a Shangri-La called Yalalag, remote in the mountains of Oaxaca, inhabited by a particularly fine type of Zapoteco-Serrano Indian, and rarely visited by people from the outside world. His talk had been sufficiently persuasive to fire me with enthusiasm for this pilgrimage.

Meanwhile we had occasionally seen, in Oaxaca City, handsome Indian women of an almost unworldly dignity, dressed in distinctive spotlessly white dresses, selling cloths of a special weave. We had been told that they were Yalaltecas, and they increased our keenness to see their home.

I had twice tried to undertake this journey, but on each occasion my duties in the capital and elsewhere had rendered it impossible. Finally, late in 1944, an absence of a week or so seemed feasible; my companions were also eager to visit this little-known place—the Dobrowolskis mainly to spend a healthy week in what was said to be glorious country, and to get away from the hustle of Mexico City, and Bullock because he is supremely interested in everything pertaining to Indians, past or present, and never loses an opportunity of getting close to them.

Having already reconnoitred the road to Oaxaca in our own cars, we knew that it is something of a strain on them. We had therefore travelled by omnibus this time, spending the first night in Puebla. The road, opened only recently, is altogether 345 miles long. Mountainous and beautiful in the extreme, it crosses little-known country, passing small Mixtec villages only occasionally. The last sixty tortuous miles were as yet unfinished.

Oaxaca City is, for many who know it, the most attractive place in all Mexico. It has a perfect climate and a drowsy atmosphere, and as yet suffers little from tourists. Unlimited quantities of that attribute known as "local colour", lovely colonial buildings and spectacular remains of ancient civilisations suffice to enchant the most exigent visitor. But on this occasion we had left again in a small local bus bound for Mitla the following morning with a rather motley collection of luggage (including hammocks and kit-bags, and Bullock's *sarape*-enveloped personal belongings). The flinty road thither runs south-eastwards through a wide valley, and is, except for the last mile, part of what will ultimately be the next section of the Pan-American Highway from Alaska to Patagonia. After two punctures we had reached Mitla and repaired to its *fonda*, called "La Sorpresa".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A remarkable book on Mitla and on the social organisation of its Zapotec inhabitants has been written by an American anthropologist, Elsie Parsons, and is entitled: *Mitla, the Town of Souls*. (1936.)

The owners of the fonda, Don Rafael Toro y Gallardo and his wife, Doña Angélica, are also in charge of the small post office. They are, I believe, the only *mestizos* in the village, which is entirely Indian. Mitla has a strange appearance—its houses are mostly of adobe, and its fences are formed of ten feet high organ-cactus (the *Pachycereus marginatus* of botany), in common with many places in this region. Bullock and I had been there twice before, and we were welcomed as old friends by the Toros. We had another acquaintance there too, a Zapotec *curandera* (witch-doctress), if her reputation is justified. This person is a handsome and persuasive Indian woman of strong character called Petronila Santiago. She invariably has Zapotec antiquities to sell, and one can get good pieces if one's patience is sufficient to sit in her small hut until the last things are brought out. After a visit to her, which on this occasion produced an all too expensive funerary urn, we visited the house of Manuel's father for preliminary discussions about the animals, which had been reserved in advance for us. Then, expecting a gruelling day on the morrow, we went early to bed. The absence of any reliable large-scale map of the region ahead of us, rendered the services of Manuel and Pif absolutely indispensable.

This, then, was the background on the November morning I have referred to. After a good deal of tightening of girths, shortening or lengthening of stirrups, and some scientific "stowing" of the pack burro's rather ungainly cargo, we passed through Mitla in an easterly direction, leaving the last road we were to see for a week, and disappearing into the blue haze of the mountains.

The route lay along a wide, though gradually narrowing, valley which diverges from the main one. After about half an hour, there was a shout from behind and we perceived our friend Don Rafael running in the already noticeable heat with a gift of a flask of *mescal*, which he had intended to give us before we set out. It was typical of this kindly man, and we thanked him sincerely at the time, and blessed him fervently later on, for the rather fiery liquid proved to be an excellent stimulant on many occasions during the strenuous journey ahead.

We continued along the flat valley until the steep mountains forming its eastern end were close at hand, and then turned

sharply and unexpectedly to the north, following the bed of a narrow boulder-bestrewn stream which flows between high vertical cliffs. The water level was low, but in the rainy season the stream becomes a raging torrent for weeks on end, and there is no communication with Mitla from this direction. We were hardly accustomed as yet to our mounts, and the little cañon resounded for some time with words of encouragement and imprecation ranging from "*Nie ciagnac*" (Polish for "don't pull"), to exclamations in Zapotec, and mule-talk in English and Spanish as well. But the beasts soon showed their form, for which I have nothing but praise, and we realised that they probably knew best. Indeed, throughout this often rather gruelling four-day journey the small and unimpressive looking mules—they were little larger than donkeys—tackled a job with which few horses could have coped.

They showed remarkable stamina and steadiness, and were beyond criticism, even if Anna's "Bocho" occasionally tended to lag, or Bullock's small black animal sometimes found enough spare energy to have a little run by himself when there was nobody on his back. However, plainsmen invariably marvel at the resistance and strength of mountaineers, whether human or equine, and as these animals and their attendants were accustomed to such treks, their achievements were hardly surprising.

After about three-quarters of an hour of difficult progress we climbed out of the *barranca*. The way led steeply upwards. The flora changed noticeably, and the view became grandiose. For some time the only signs of human presence were sloping golden maize *milpas* (fields), and, very occasionally, a shack covered with maize leaves. Mountain ranges appeared one behind the other in every direction, their tints growing less defined as they receded. We passed a few sturdy silent Indians with black felt hats, carrying heavy loads of kindling wood by a thong around the forehead (the *mecapal*). They were Mijes, for we were near the limits of the Zapotec and Mije territories. The path continued to rise, and we entered a zone of oaks. Many of the trees bore large quantities of parasitic and epiphytic plants, the most noticeable being a small species of orchid with graceful heliotrope blooms.

After about five hours, we halted in an idyllic spot on the top of a cliff, and broke our fast. Manuel and Pif were true to form in preferring to eat the *tortillas* universal in Mexico. They travelled with very few encumbrances, but each produced a *tortilla* ration from somewhere.

Later we entered a rocky region, still rising. The track ended, and we asked ourselves how the animals could negotiate the great irregular outcrops of rock. But they were quite unperturbed, and we passed this area as though it were a flat field. From this time on the mules had our complete confidence, which even the most formidable obstacle failed to shake.

Although by now the sun was at its zenith, and, if we dismounted and walked for long, we were bathed in perspiration, the atmosphere and the scene were exhilarating, and the view increased in magnificence every minute.

Around five o'clock we crossed over a watershed, beyond which was a long wooded slope leading down to a lush valley with a small limpid stream running through it. Manuel very politely regretted that we were not making sufficiently good time to reach the hamlet of Santo Domingo Albarradas before nightfall. We believed him. My experience of mountain people in several countries is that they are loth to calculate any distance in terms of miles or kilometres, but purely in terms of hours, and as they estimate their own, unaccompanied, speed, their predictions of time of arrival at a given spot have little relation to fact, when they are slowed down by the presence of plainsmen or heavily laden pack animals. Consequently we very soon learned to add some time to Manuel's estimates. On this occasion night fell with its usual tropical suddenness a considerable time before we reached our destination. Santo Domingo lies at the foot of a steep rocky hillside, with no defined path, and we were all, I believe, pleasantly surprised to arrive in the hamlet without accident in the pitch dark. But the animals put up a remarkable, almost cat-like, performance, and continued steadily and unconcernedly downwards through the boulders, never once hesitating or placing their feet imprudently.

We made our way to the centre of the settlement, aided only by a few guttering candles which appeared here and there

through the doors of sheds or houses. On arrival at the school-building we were at once offered by the *maestro* (school teacher) the school-room itself as sleeping quarters. The *maestro* was delighted to see us (he and his family are probably the only non-Indians in the place), and he provided us with fodder, *tortillas* and eggs, besides certain utensils for cooking, of which we were in need. The Indians crowded around curiously, for a *forastero* is a rarity in these mountain villages. The remoteness of this one was indicated by the fact that the latest newspaper that the *maestro* had been able to obtain was three months old.

The day had been a very hard one, some of us were just a little saddle-sore, and we all slept soundly in *sarape*, camp-bed, sweat-bag or hammock.

We were up before dawn, using the near-by village *pila* (fountain) for our ablutions, while it was still dark. The early morning was very chilly, but as soon as one could see, innumerable Indian children, enveloped up to the eyes in multi-coloured *sarapes*, gathered around to giggle at Anna's very practical "jeans", or to stare silently with wide black eyes at the strange beings we must have seemed to them.

It was about seven o'clock before the beasts were loaded and we finally got moving. The route was now moderately level for a stretch. By ten o'clock we found ourselves only slightly higher up, on a spur overlooking a narrow and apparently bottomless gorge, beyond which were the highest mountains we had yet seen. From here a well-defined, though rock-strewn, track led down through trees, descending with some steepness parallel to the rift. After about half an hour we sighted far below a satiny ribbon of water—the Río de la Hamaca. Thereupon the path began to zigzag, and we ultimately reached the edge of this turbulent little river, which shows evidence of occasional violence, for the banks are silted up and whole trees cast up about twenty feet above the stream. Although the depth at this time was not formidable, the current was very strong, and a man could not stand up to it alone. Pif rode the sturdiest beast over and then cast his lasso back across the stream to help the remainder. Finally he sent the original animal back for Manuel and its first rider. Most of the

baggage, and we ourselves, got a refreshing dousing, and the water was icy cold. This river is named "the river of the rope-bridge" because when it is in flood the Indians who are obliged to cross it construct hammock bridges of rope far above its highest level.

Beyond this river another stiff climb faced us, and then a highly picturesque route far above, and parallel to, a tributary of the river we had just crossed. New kinds of globular cacti began to appear, and we passed under many highly coloured spiders measuring about four inches across, who sat in their enormous webs right above the path.

Around one o'clock we arrived at another steep descent which led to a second river crossing, but this one was a mere stream. Beyond, a very long hot climb awaited us, to a hill-top, from which the picturesque hamlet of San Mateo Cajonos was visible far away across a deep valley to the north-west. The track at last became well defined, and we continued for two hours between maize *milpas* on the western slope of a long shadeless *meseta*. Between three and four o'clock we reached the end of this and, veering suddenly eastwards, obtained simultaneously an invigorating wind in our faces, and our first glimpse of our destination. Yalalag lay tranquilly below us about a mile away, dominated by its great whitewashed sixteenth century church.

Yalalag was formerly known as Villa Hidalgo. According to the Oaxaca State records, there was no town here before the Conquest, so the location evidently appealed to the adventurous monks who built the church and attracted the Indians of the region to settle down around it. To-day it is a town of about 5,000 Zapoteco-Serrano Indians, and belongs politically to the District of Villa Alta, a small town some distance to the north. The only non-Indians we saw in Yalalag were the *cura* (priest) the schoolmaster, the wife of the storekeeper, and Doña Tomasina, who cooked for us during our stay.

Yalalag is disposed in a rather straggling manner over an irregular hillside facing north, and has three *barrios* or sections. Immediately in front of it is a very deep narrow ravine, through which gurgles or roars, according to the time of year, a small but strong-flowing mountain river called locally

"Hiel-Llavio", or some similar Zapotec name, the meaning of which I was unable to ascertain. Immediately below Yalalag are several spectacular cataracts, and beyond the ravine is another ridge, whose steep slopes are covered with *milpas* of maize and other crops. From its summit, the best general view of Yalalag is obtained, and to the north the area of Villa Alta (though not the town) is visible in the remote distance. To the west and north-west are fine views of a small river running through a deep valley. The whole scene is unforgettably beautiful.

We rode down into Yalalag. A woman spoke to a neighbour in Zapotec, and very aptly mentioned Santa Anita, evidently referring to blonde, beautiful Anna Dobrowolski, riding into town on a humble little mule with the sun at her back.

Approaching the church square, we saw for the first time the magnificently woven Yalalag *huipiles*<sup>1</sup> in their proper setting. Handsome women were coming out of the church, impressive with their jet-black hair, spotlessly white *huipiles* and bare feet. The only colour in the Yalaltecan everyday costume is the light brown-and-white striped skirt, projecting a little below the long "smock", and two little tassels of coloured silk on the breast, usually pink or green. The women, accustomed from childhood to carrying burdens on their heads, have the usual graceful carriage that this induces and, in general, have a superbly dignified bearing.

We made for the municipal building and asked for the *Presidente Municipal*. This official in Mexico usually corresponds to the mayor, but in the case of Yalalag it would appear that his functions go somewhat further. He is elected by popular vote every two years, and the present incumbent takes his duties very seriously. We were ushered into a spacious ante-room, devoid of furniture but spotlessly clean. Portraits of the President of the Republic and of the hero Benito Juárez—who was a Zapotec, and of whom his race is very proud—hung on the walls. We proceeded into a small and equally spotless office, where a dignified Indian of benign professorial appearance greeted us with cordiality and dignity, speaking adequate,

<sup>1</sup> Ample smock-like blouses worn by the women of most Indian tribes in Mexico and Guatemala.



if not particularly eloquent, Spanish. This was Don Eucario Vargas, the *Presidente*.

He put himself and the town entirely "at our orders", at once gave instructions for a dwelling place to be cleaned and prepared for us, and modestly expressed surprise and pleasure that strangers should come so far in order to visit his humble municipality. He was unable to remember any previous visits of this nature, but he had not been long in office, and we subsequently ascertained from the small autograph book kept by the owner of the one *tienda* in the town that no *forasteros* had been there during the preceding nine months. Don Eucario enquired solicitously what we proposed to do, and whether he could help us in any way. Bullock replied that he wished to obtain some specimens of Yalalag weaving, and that we should be delighted if it were possible to acquire one or two of the silver crosses which we believed had been fashioned there in the Colonial period, and of which we had seen a few examples in private collections in Oaxaca and Mexico City. The *Presidente* at once offered us the services of a Spanish-speaking youth who would take us, if we wished, to all the houses in the town, introduce us to their occupants, and enquire whether they had such things for sale, for that would be the most effective way to locate them. We gratefully accepted his offer, and, before we left Yalalag, we went to the majority of the houses whose owners were sufficiently well-to-do to possess these articles. We were everywhere received with a dignified friendliness, and some of the women we met who spoke Spanish asked intelligent questions about the outside world, which is unusual in Mexico's Indian communities.

We were in due course guided to an enormous bare room—fully twenty yards long—on the first floor of the *Palacio Municipal*, above the tiny dreamy telegraph-office. It had just been swept out. A small portable wash-stand and a jug of water were produced from somewhere, and a boy was ordered by the *Presidente* to do our slightest behest. Fodder was quickly brought for the animals, which were already haltered under a shady tree in the adjacent square. The room allocated to us had six small balconies with double doors, offering a magnificent view to the north-west. We made



View of the south-east corner of the Valley of Mexico, from the mountain road to Cuernavaca. (*page 19*)



*Top.* Street in the village of Mitla (Oaxaca), showing organ-cactus fences. (page 40)

*Below.* Cuernavaca panorama. (page 70)



Young ladies of Yalalag, in "*rosete*" and "*huipil*". (page 50)



*Above.* "Yalalag type" silver rosary crosses. (About one-third natural size.) (pages 48 and 142)



*Below.* The jade Mixtec plaque from Santa María Albarradas. (Reduced by approximately one-third.) (page 56)

ourselves comfortable, according to the possibilities of our different equipment.

Manuel and Pif each merely spread a scanty *sarape* on the floor, lay down and talked contentedly (and incessantly) in low guttural Zapotec tones. For cousins they seemed to have a remarkable lot to say to each other, and I was curious to know whether the habits of the undoubtedly amusing strangers they were accompanying provided the main topic of conversation. But they were extremely polite boys, and not once was there the slightest indication of untoward curiosity about us or disrespectful amusement. They had some difficulty in understanding the Yalalag dialect, they told me, and consequently kept very much to themselves during our stay there.

For eating purposes we were directed to a narrow dark hut, tucked away in a corner of the square, where a small round *mestiza* called Tomasina, from another part of the State of Oaxaca, ran the only eating-place for non-residents. Her inseparable companion was a *marrano*—a small red-and-black piglet—at which she directed a never-ceasing monologue during the day, and which she put to bed in a sack at night. We had all our simple meals in this place, and we enjoyed them. Everything came out of huge smoke-blackened clay pots, and, when we left, the price to pay was absurdly low. Very few other people seemed to eat there, except on market-day, when numerous Mije Indians, who had done good business, patronised the establishment and, I fear, left their complement of fleas—much to our discomfort the following night. Apart from this occasion, we were not worried by any insect pests at all, for Yalalag is kept extremely clean, and the inhabitants, as we had ample opportunity of observing, maintain a standard of personal hygiene that could compare very favourably with that of many white people. The town is remarkable in that it has drinking- and washing-fountains in some number, disposed not only in the centre of the town, but also in the more humble outskirts. Besides fountains, it has several concrete ablution places, with separate sections for the men and women. Each has running water, and we can testify that they are put to good use, for on several occasions we saw people quite naked under the taps soaping themselves with

enthusiasm. Immediately opposite our "residence" was a large concrete open-air swimming bath, discreetly screened. Although it was not filled with water (owing, I understood, to temporarily inadequate water pressure), we were able to take showers as often as we wished. All these conveniences have been installed on the initiative of the Indian residents. This is, I believe, unique in Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

On the following day we spent a good deal of time, accompanied by the guide appointed by the *Presidente*, in searching for the crosses already referred to. We acquired a few, and later, as the news spread that we were seeking such things, many people came to offer them to us. (These crosses are referred to in more detail in Chapter VII.)

The inhabitants also offered us specimens of their fine weaving, and Bullock purchased a number of white *huipiles* and other garments. His manner with Indians is excellent, and many people might well model their behaviour on his. He is invariably careful not to shake them by the hand, which he insists they do not like. Instead, he merely goes through the movements, in effect only brushing his palm against theirs. He speaks to them very softly, with a pleasant inflexion of the voice, and discusses a point with infinite patience, and without any nervous gestures, just as they do themselves.

We asked whether it would be possible to photograph some of the women of Yalalag in their traditional head-dress, which is bulky and formed of a skein of very thick black wool, wound around the head like a halo. This head-dress, known by the Spanish name of *rodete*, is over eight feet long when unwound. We were told that it had become expensive to make, and was consequently rarely worn nowadays. A somewhat similar, though less cumbersome, form of *rodete* is occasionally used by the Totonac women in Vera Cruz and Puebla. With the *Presidente's* help, two ladies were found who possessed *rodetes*, and willingly put them on for us to photograph. (They took an unconscionable time about their toilet, like some of their more sophisticated sisters.) The accompanying photograph shows two young Yalaltecas wearing *rodetes*.

<sup>1</sup> Of the Indians in Mexico, the Zapotecs of Tehuantepec (Tehuans) and the Totonacs of Vera Cruz also have reputations for extreme personal cleanliness.

I also photographed various other inhabitants of the town; it was significant and rather pleasing that most of them asked me how much they owed me after the operation, instead of insisting in advance that *I* should pay for the privilege of taking their portraits, which is not unusual in other parts of the country.

Hearing that Friday was Yalalag's market-day, we resolved not to leave until the Saturday, in order to see what manner of people attended the local market.

A market anywhere in Mexico is worth visiting, and particularly one in a remote place which is a rallying point for the surrounding countryside. In this case we had been told that Mijes usually came in some numbers from their villages to the east, notably Tlahuitoltepec,<sup>1</sup> which is the most westerly Mije settlement in this sector.

Early on the Friday morning the little plaza was swept spotlessly clean and people from outside began to arrive. The Mijes came in some numbers, bringing fruit and vegetables, salt, rope, wickerwork articles and a variety of other things. They arrived in what appeared to be family groups and arranged themselves on the ground in straggling lines.

The Mijes were formerly doughty warriors, and the task of subduing them proved an extremely difficult one for the Spaniards, not only on account of their ferocity, but also because their territory is inaccessible and easily defensible.

Compared with the spotlessly clean mountain Zapotecs, the

<sup>1</sup> The name Tlahuitoltepec is Nahuatl. Its significance is probably best rendered as "the mountain near the place of the reeds and the irrigated cultivated place". There is nothing strange in the fact that the name is entirely foreign to the inhabitants of the village (who speak the Mije tongue, and probably 10 per cent of them Spanish). As mentioned elsewhere, Aztec names are to be found all over Southern and Central Mexico, irrespective of the race and language of the present-day inhabitants. This has come about either by virtue of subjugation of the original inhabitants through Aztec colonisation under the later Emperors, by imperial military occupation, or by the employment of Aztec-speaking troops by one or other of the Spanish *Conquistadores*. Probably most of the place-names in the state of Oaxaca are Nahuatl, and the one in question is doubtless attributable to the fact that a decade or so after the fall of the Central Empire, Pedro de Alvarado was sent by Cortés to "clean up" the Mije region, with Tlaxcalan troops. In any case there is no record of any earlier name, and this goes for many places in Oaxaca. Important places in Mexico well outside the truly Aztec area which bear Nahuatl names are Mazatlan, the main port on the Pacific coast, Papantla (in the state of Vera Cruz), Acapulco (in Guerrero), Tepic (in Nayarit), and Tehuantepec (on the isthmus of that name).



Mijes look scruffy and dirty, even at a market, which is generally regarded as a social function by Indians. For the most part they are a taciturn and not very agreeable people. The men are raggedly attired in nondescript clothes and wear shapeless, dirty, black felt hats; the women wear a short *huipil* of variable colour, tucked into the very long skirt which is of a coarse, dark green (almost black) material, and occasionally pleated. A small headband, made of a twisted skein of red wool, and a profusion of bead necklaces complete their toilette.

As far as I could ascertain, most of the Mije women present spoke no language besides their own. A few of the men spoke a little Spanish, which they used in order to understand their Zapotec neighbours.

I had previously made the acquaintance of a rather remarkable character—a young American missionary, called Walter Miller. It had fallen to his lot, among other things, to study the Mije tongue and to translate part of the New Testament into it. I am not sure whether this duty did not overlap with the activities of the Spanish monks in the Colonial period, who certainly produced some Mije glossaries, but such is the fact. This task could only be accomplished by living among the Mijes, which Walter Miller did for some months at a time over a series of years.

He chose for his headquarters a village called Camotlan (“the place of the sweet potatoes”). At the outset, the Camotlecos were suspicious and unhelpful, but relations improved after a time, and the predominant attitude towards him slowly passed from antagonism and suspicion, through tolerance and acceptance, appreciation and respect, finally, I believe, to the Mije version of affection.

In the past, the Zapotecs of several villages in the Yalalag region bred silkworms and produced high-grade articles from their silk, but this activity is probably now carried on only at the village of San Francisco Cajonos, about four hours’ ride from Yalalag in a westerly direction. Some Indians from this village were at the market and had brought a few examples of this work with them. The texture of these scarves and other articles is extremely soft, and most of them are coloured magenta from dye made from the cochineal insect. The use of

this is no longer common in Mexico, for commercial aniline dyes have tended to supplant it.

The business acumen, stamina and general enterprise of the Zapotec traders were apparent from the presence of numerous merchants from different parts of the State, who arrived at the market with both home-woven and factory-made materials. These they carried on their backs in large bales, including stuffs of all varieties, from shirts to *ponchos* and *sarapes*. In spite of the very arduous travelling conditions their wares were cheap, and they themselves arrived fresh and immaculate.

It was on this day that the *Presidente* asked me rather diffidently whether I could do the municipality a great favour. It seemed that they were most anxious to obtain a panoramic photograph of their town. Could I possibly help them? I gladly agreed to do my best and pointed out that the sun's position indicated the top of the spur to the south, across the Hiel-llavio gorge, as the best place from which to take such a picture. The *Presidente* said he would be pleased to take me there and the two of us set out early in the afternoon, accompanied by four or five of the head men of the town. What had looked like a gentle stroll developed into a hot and gruelling excursion, particularly in view of the depth of the ravine to be crossed. When the summit was finally reached, I was drenched with perspiration and, I fear, wheezing like a superannuated cab-horse. My companions, some of whom were already advanced in years, insisted tactfully and sympathetically that it was indeed a hard climb, but none showed the least sign either of fatigue or of perspiration.

It was an interesting experience, accompanying these strong, silent and indefatigable mountaineers, but I felt very much out of place and almost inclined to apologise for my inadequacy. But the competition seemed to be taking on the character of a battle of prestige between the so-called "civilised" white race and the so-called "savage" brown, so I gritted my teeth and stuck out both the outward and homeward journeys without stopping, arriving in due course at our "residence" in a parlous condition. Unfortunately for all concerned the effort was crowned by anticlimax, for the photographs were not a

success and some weeks later I was obliged to write a disappointing letter to Don Eucario.

We obtained the impression that no archæological traces have been found in the vicinity of Yalalag. We were always on the look-out for such things, but the only article we encountered was a crudely sculpted stone figure which had been given a black moustache and eyebrows, painted with what was probably *chapopote*.<sup>1</sup> This was in the possession of the shop-keeper, who had bought it from a Mije. The Mijes still worship these idols, at least clandestinely, and Mije archæological articles are consequently hard to acquire. Besides this we saw in Yalalag only some barbaric wooden ceremonial masks, the age of which it was impossible to assess, though most of them were in all probability post-Conquest.

We left Yalalag homeward-bound at dawn the following day and reached Santo Domingo Albarradas a little after noon. After halting here for food we decided to take an alternative route in order to reach Mitla. It seemed that Manuel's father had a small property in the hamlet of Santa Maria Albarradas, and that he had meanwhile left Mitla in order to join his wife at the latter place, which is somewhat to the south-east of Santo Domingo. We would therefore push on, and spend the night at Santa Maria, where Manuel assured us his mother would give us a warm welcome. It was a long ride, though the route was rather easier than the one we had covered on the first day out. We reached the hamlet, which lies on a rock-strewn mountainside, about half an hour after dark. Manuel's parents were hospitality itself and offered us everything they had. It was a warm, starlit night and we decided we would sleep on a bare maize patch adjoining the Martinez house, subject to approval. This approval was readily forthcoming, and we began to arrange camp according to our several resources, but very soon Manuel's young brothers appeared, carrying out of the house an iron bedstead, on which, they stated, the Señora insisted Anna should sleep. We agreed, in order not to give offence; whereupon a table and a bench also made their appearance. Very soon a fire was crackling under

<sup>1</sup> The Mexican name for the black viscous form of crude oil which is occasionally found at the earth's surface in some parts of the country.

the stars, and Anna produced a very welcome meal. Mother Martinez kept us company, and conversation at first was brisk. I personally was somewhat drowsy and I think we all regretted that the morrow would find us back in comparative civilisation.

After the meal, only the women talked, and I paid little attention. I do, however, recall one particularly illuminating snatch of conversation. Señora Martinez had apparently introduced the topic of husbands and was saying that Don Pepe—her own—was a very good man, for they had been married twenty-two years and he had never yet beaten her. He was really an exceptional character.

*"¿Usted, Señora, cuanto tiempo lleva de casada?"*

Anna replied that she had been married three years.

*"¿Su esposo nunca le ha pegado?"*

Anna replied, quite seriously, that Stefan had never beaten her.

*"Pues, tiene Usted mucha suerte. ¡Nunca se sabe con los hombres! Tampoco se emborracha?"* (Then you are very lucky. You never know with men! And doesn't he get drunk either?)

*"Tampoco,"* replied Anna.

"Then," said the Señora gravely, "you should give thanks to God for his protection up till now. But there is still much time."

Such is evidently the lot of Indian women, but the mere idea of mild, chivalrous Stefan Dobrowolski beating Anna was so ludicrous, that I was at pains to avoid laughing aloud.

With the first light a loud treble mass bleating from our immediate vicinity proclaimed the presence of large numbers of lambs or kids, and we found that a corral at the edge of the *milpa* indeed housed over two hundred nanny-goats and small kids of every conceivable colour, which were now driven up into the higher pastures for the day, the kids pirouetting and gambolling and cutting every kind of caprine antic. This herd represented a considerable capital to Don Pepe who, by virtue of it, was the most important man in the place. It seems evident that these mountain goats have not the same penetrating odour as most of their kin, for we did not suspect their presence under our noses at all, until the dawn encouraged them to announce it vocally.

The second surprise in store for us was an archæological one. We enquired whether anybody in the hamlet had any *cabecitas* (little heads) that had been dug up while ploughing. (The country folk of Mexico refer to all old things found in the ground as *cabecitas*, *monos* [monkeys], or *idolitos*.) Some rather primitive, broken objects were brought, which were not interesting, and which Bullock and I rejected. Five minutes later a young man approached me with something which he said he had found while ploughing his *milpa* a few weeks earlier. It was a large plaque of good quality American jade (I say "American", because the Chinese form of this mineral is considered superior, and many connoisseurs refer to jade from Mexico or Central America as "jadeite" or "nephrite"). Although I did not immediately recognise the qualities of this plaque, I bought it, realising that it was of Mixtec origin and probably a "trade piece", for the Mixtecs never settled as far east as this. (The piece is illustrated here.) It bears a symmetrical, though primitive, incised representation of a god or possibly of a hieratical personage. Irwin Bullock feigned to be upset at not obtaining it himself and it has become a perennial source of chaffing. This beautiful and interesting piece of jade is no longer in my possession, for the authorities of the Museo Nacional considered that it came under the heading of pieces which in the national interest should not leave the country.

The following day we reached our starting point, Mitla, through San Lorenzo Albarradas. This was the third Albarradas village we had visited, and there are two more, San Miguel and Santa Catarina, farther to the west, which we did not see. Beyond the rather large village of San Lorenzo we climbed over a high pass and dropped down into the eastern end of the long valley in which Mitla lies, reaching Mitla about four o'clock in the afternoon.

This trip into the Sierra of Oaxaca was perhaps my best contact with the Zapotec Indians and their territory. From what I have seen and heard of the other Indian races in Mexico, I should say that the Zapotecs of to-day are the finest, most vigorous and progressive group of Indians in the country.

*Sonora*

Of all my other interesting excursions away from the beaten track, probably my short contact with the Seri Indians of Sonora is of the greatest general interest. An account of it is appropriate here, for if the Zapotecs are the most progressive of Mexico's Indians, the Seris are indubitably the most primitive and retarded. The only two scientific papers about them that exist, in fact, express the view that they are by most standards the most primitive human community now living on the North American continent.

The Seris (or Xeris) to-day number less than 300 souls, and are of no importance except to the student of anthropology. Very few Mexicans know anything about them, and I have heard of only two foreigners besides myself who have taken the trouble to visit them in the last fifty years.<sup>1</sup>

What remains of the once numerous Seri nation inhabits a remote area, comprising the island of Tiburon, in the gulf of California at latitude 29° N., and the adjacent coast of Sonora. The region is most barren and uninviting, and well away from civilisation. The Seris to-day are thus far from headline news, and normally one hears nothing about them.

When I at last heard about them, I determined that I must see this isolated vestige of a tribe whose standard of living is comparable with that of the Stone Age; which has never even grasped the significance of agriculture, and whose diet in consequence consists only of what the tribe can kill, either in the sea or on land.

But Tiburon Island—how to get there? When I spoke to Don Roberto Weitlaner about my aspirations, he requested me, if I got there, to make a semi-official report to the Anthropological section of Mexico's National Museum. I therefore felt emboldened to request facilities from Hermosillo, the capital of the State of Sonora. An occasion for one of my routine journeys to the Pacific coast soon arose, and in due course I spoke tentatively to the Mexican Defence Ministry of the possibility of a visit to Tiburon, asking whether it would be possible to obtain a "jeep" in which to cross the desert from Hermosillo to

<sup>1</sup> See page 60.

a place on the coast, called on the map Bahía Kino, not very far from the southern end of Tiburon.

The General commanding the 4th Military Zone, the headquarters of which is at Hermosillo, was consulted, and his reply exceeded my greatest expectations, for he gave orders for a coast-guard vessel of the Mexican Navy to be at my disposal at the port of Guaymas for any length of time that I should need her services. It subsequently transpired that only thus could I have succeeded in my venture, for had I reached Bahia Kino by land, it is doubtful whether I should have been able to obtain any vessel capable of taking me to Tiburon. I did not, however, know this at the time.

I reached Guaymas on the day before that appointed for sailing, arriving from Santa Rosalia (across the gulf, in Baja California) in a small cargo ship that made the crossing in one night. This region is one of the hottest in Mexico, and the temperature was so high that I slept on deck without bedding. On the following evening I went aboard the "Guardacostas 23", and we sailed at dawn. My idea was to steam up the coast to Bahía Kino, land there and find out the latest location of the Seris (or of their nearest group), for the people I had come so far to see are still nomadic, and most of the tribe have no permanent abode, although they rarely, if ever, leave their own, rather limited, area.

By about nine a.m., the weather clouded over (an almost unheard-of thing) and we were enveloped in a thick mist for some hours. Around ten o'clock the rocky islet of San Pedro Nolasco loomed out of the white blanket that surrounded us. This place I understood to be a permanent sea-lion colony, and I was hoping to see and photograph these animals in some numbers, even though it meant climbing ashore to do so. We encircled the islet as close as possible inshore, but not a sign of a sea-lion did I see through my glasses. It looked as though the sea-lions, like the Seris, were nomadic, or possibly migratory, or that my information was inaccurate.

The Gulf of California is, we are told, teeming with numerous and curious forms of marine life, but on this particular voyage, I regret to say that I made the acquaintance only of groups of a cetacean called *tonina*, evidently the local representative of

the porpoise family, for its rather endearing and trusting habits are eminently porpoise-like.

Around noon the weather improved. To starboard the profile of the Sonoran coast changed gradually from a strange succession of irregular, bare, reddish peaks to a low line of dunes and, as visibility increased, we could detect high mountains in the distance as a vague, grey wall.

Soon the outline of the island of San Esteban could be made out to the north-west and right ahead a huge grey mass, which we identified as Tiburon. Nearer at hand to the north-east appeared a sharp pinnacle of rock, whitened with guano, which is a sort of Sonoran Ailsa Craig, known as la Isla de los Pelícanos. Although hundreds of pelicans live on it, the pelican is not its most numerous inhabitant, for on closer inspection I observed swarms of tropic birds, frigate birds, terns, cormorants and boobies (which are called in Mexico *pájaros bobos*). Beyond this islet, on the mainland, lay the village of Bahía Kino, where I had decided to land.

This place, named after the Jesuit priest Francisco Eusebio Kino (one of the three most important of the Jesuit missionaries in Baja California, at the end of the seventeenth century), turned out to be a large, straggling collection of wooden shacks in the dunes. It is a very out-of-the-way place, for about sixty miles of near-desert separate it from Hermosillo. Some of the Seris come to Kino from time to time, if they have fish to sell.

There was insufficient water for the "Guardacostas 23" to go inshore, so she anchored about two miles off and the launch was put out for us, with the dinghy in tow. We transferred to the latter about 300 yards from the beach and negotiated the heavy surf in it, not without getting a thorough dousing in the operation.

A visit from the Mexican Navy to Kino was evidently quite an event, for a large and curious crowd gathered on the beach. There are no places of any importance whatever in the gulf north of Guaymas, and the captain confessed that he had never been up in these waters before. The marine charts in use were old American ones and it was necessary to take soundings very frequently, lest age should be synonymous with inaccuracy.

At Kino I found a man called Pablo Camargo, who claimed



to know the Seris well. He had lived with them, I was told, and had befriended them within his modest means. He gladly agreed to come aboard and to guide us to the nearest group on the morrow. We accordingly returned to the ship at sunset. She lay at anchor until dawn and Camargo spent some of the evening telling me all he knew about his friends the Seris. He dealt largely with the present. He stressed the miserable conditions in which these people lived, and told me of the establishment by the Sonoran state authorities of a fishing syndicate for them and of the installation of refrigerating apparatus at a place called Desemboque Arroyo San Ignacio on the coast farther north. He spoke of certain exploitation of the Seris which had unfortunately taken place, and of internal dissension that had resulted and had finally split the tribe. He appealed to me with every sign of sincerity to "get something done".

I had previously read all there was to read about these almost forgotten people, but the lack of literature is perhaps counterbalanced by the colourfulness and fascinating quality of what has been written. It seems that only two anthropologists have ever written about the Seris. In the 1880's the American McGee produced a monograph on them, published in the seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, and in 1931 another American, A. L. Kroeber, of the University of California, wrote a shorter, up-to-date account, published by the South-West Museum, Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> Both authors admit having spent relatively little time in actual contact with them, and Kroeber condemns McGee's writings on the subject as being too colourful and dramatic. The latter collected a good deal of material about the Seri's past, both from the vague references to them in documents of the Colonial era, and from presumably more accurate local Mexican sources in the last century.

From early Colonial times, when the Seris numbered

<sup>1</sup> Since writing this I have ascertained that it is on record that an Italian ethnologist named Gini took body measurements of the Seri some years ago, but the Mexican authorities have no knowledge of any resulting report.

Recently I have come across a short paper published in 1931 by the Cuban Geographical Society, referring to a visit to the Seri made the previous year by Colonel Giovanni Masturzi, one of the Society's members.

several thousands, they had a fearsome reputation for ferocity, intractability and feats of physical endurance and fleetness of foot. Some of the colourful anecdotes quoted in all seriousness by McGee are wellnigh unbelievable. Until some time in the last century they used poisoned arrows with deadly effect against the *Yoris*—as they call all non-Seris. But little by little their aggressive mode of life has passed, and they themselves have been decimated numerically.

Both McGee and Kroeber agree that the Seris are a finely built people, distinctly above the average stature for American Indians and with well-developed bodies, long, thin limbs and unusually slender hands and feet. They probably have the darkest-coloured skin of any Indians in North America.

Camargo told me that the majority of the tribe had now settled down at Desemboque Arroyo San Ignacio, but that two small groups had left the main one. One of these lived at present at a place known as Tecomate, at the northern extremity of the island of Tiburon, and the other was completely nomadic and spent its time moving about from place to place farther south—that is, nearer to Bahia Kino. Furthermore, the former chief of the tribe, a fine specimen of manhood called Chico Romero, had been ousted as a result of the internal disagreements, and was now the head of this latter group.

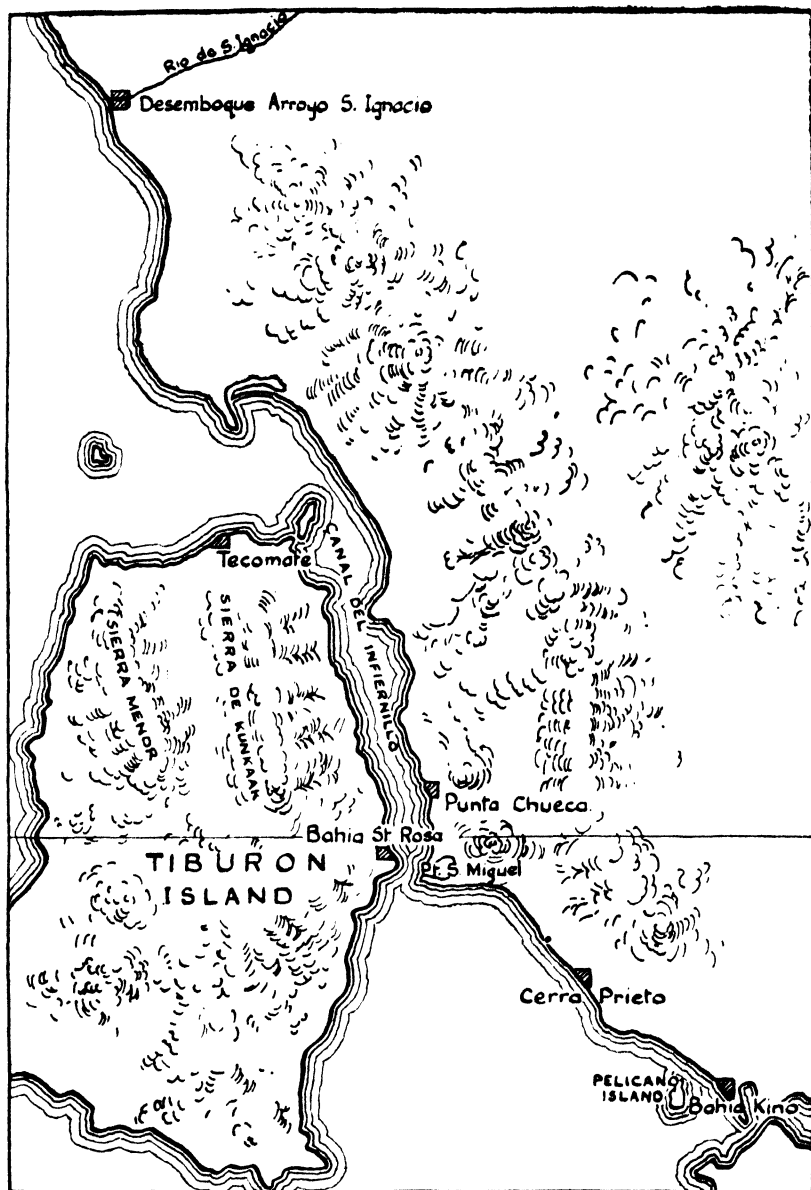
The twenty-miles-long channel between the north-eastern side of Tiburon and the mainland, picturesquely called “El Infiernillo” (the little Hell), is considered navigable only by small boats and, normally, Seri dug-outs are its only traffic. Its currents are said to be dangerous and unpredictable, and it is probable that its depths have never been adequately charted. This meant that if we were to reach either Desemboque or Tecomate a long sail around the outside of the island would be necessary, and lack of time rendered this impossible. So my only chance of seeing the Seris was to locate the Romero community, and Camargo thought that he could lead us to it.

By eight-thirty in the morning we anchored off a small promontory of the mainland, about midway between Kino and the southern entrance to the Infiernillo. Camargo called this place Cerro Prieto (Black Peak); it is not marked on any map, in common with all the other Seri sites referred to and

they are in my own writing on the accompanying reproduction. From the ship, no sign of life could be seen, but we went ashore in launch and dinghy and found on the beach traces of recent human presence, in the shape of two abandoned tumble-down structures, the only function of which could have been to offer some little shade against the burning sun. These *jacales* consisted of a few more or less upright sticks stuck in the sand supporting an uneven, untidy roofing of brushwood, rags, bits of board and marine algæ. Carapaces of the green turtle (*caguama*) together with hundreds of empty shells of marine molluscs were strewn around, testifying to recent meals. The only other sign of human presence was an article used as an oil container, consisting of a turtle bladder, with a piece of wood stuck into the narrow neck as a stopper. Camargo stated that about eighteen people had recently lived at this spot for some months, in spite of the very few signs of occupation. This seemed incredible; but I was not yet attuned to Seri habits or to the Seri conception of adequacy.

We re-embarked. Camargo suggested a second likely place on the mainland, this time about two miles inside the Infernillo channel. We steamed slowly northwards, prudently taking soundings all the time. Well short of the sand-bar, which all but joins Tiburon to the mainland, the captain decided to anchor, and the launch and dinghy were again put out. Accompanied by two of the ship's officers and the launch crew, we passed into the calm waters of the channel in the launch and eventually went ashore at a spot called Punta Chueca. Again we drew a blank, finding only abandoned *jacales*, no less dilapidated than the first ones, one or two long fish-spears made of crudely sharpened branches of the *palo blanco* tree, and the disorderly collection of turtle shells and molluscs that I was now beginning to associate with the Seris. The only sign of life was a line of pelicans, gravely contemplating the sea some distance away. Only the high-pitched cries of a curlew or some other wading bird broke the silence.

Camargo was at a loss, and it looked as though my curiosity was to remain unsatisfied. I decided to cross the channel, here about a mile wide, and to return to the ship along the other shore. Approaching Tiburon itself, we saw that at the water's



Map of 'SERILAND' - the island of TIBURON and the adjacent coast of SONORA.

edge was an uninterrupted line of golden sand, behind it a zone of gently rising ground, grey-green with sparse mezquite and cactus, and farther off the indistinct grey mass, which was the Sierra de Kunkaak, one of Tiburon's high, barren mountain ranges.

After following the shore for some time we sighted something black on the sand ahead. This finally resolved itself into a boat and four human figures. Only Seris could possibly be at a place as remote as this, and Camargo soon confirmed that they were indeed Seris. We approached, transferred to the dinghy and landed. I noticed with surprise that neither the rare sight of a motor launch, nor we ourselves, appeared to offer any interest whatever to the four men, who remained inert, either sitting in the large dug-out canoe or lying on the sand. Were they dead or just sick? They were not dead for they began to move slowly and deliberately, though hardly as if they had noticed us.

Camargo pointed out one of the four whom he knew, and went up and spoke to him in Spanish. This man, Roberto Thomson, is a pure Seri, in spite of his name, taken, I gathered, from an American benefactor, whom he had met as a boy in Kino. According to Camargo, he is one of the most intelligent and approachable of the Seris. He wore a tattered shirt and trousers, a fawn felt hat, several sizes too small for his shock-haired head—and sun-glasses! He spoke adequate Spanish, though very slowly. The remaining three men were wilder in appearance, with their clothes in rags, and their lustreless black hair long and unkempt. The tallest, whose name was Pedro Comito, was extremely handsome, in a sullen, animal way, and had a plait of hair half-way down his back. They showed neither surprise nor pleasure at seeing us, indeed, they appeared to register nothing at all. When I offered them cigarettes they accepted them much as a hungry cat will snatch a piece of fish, and then behaved in a rather less uncongenial manner, though spitting noisily between each puff. It appeared that they were on their way to Kino from the Tecomate settlement, to sell turtle-meat. But their capacious dug-out canoe (*piragua*) contained, as far as I could see, very little of anything, and the unpleasant looking mass that was turtle-meat might have brought them two or three pesos in all.

And it takes two days and a night to paddle from Tecomate to Kino!

It began to dawn on me what Camargo had meant, when he referred to the Seris' poverty. McGee, writing on the Seris' "behaviour", stresses certain peculiarities in their character—an inborn hatred of all *yoris*, a listless, undemonstrative apathy and an almost unbelievable indolence, which persists until gnawing hunger obliges them to take strenuous action to still it. It seemed that the fortunes of the last fifty years had served to intensify some of these traits. Perhaps their losing struggle for existence had brought about a state of mind, in which the predominating sentiments were indeed bitterness, demoralisation, resignation, or hatred of everybody not of their own race. But it was hard to say, on the spur of the moment. I fought against sentimentality, but was unable to stifle my train of thought. I saw before me in these remote and somehow rather unearthly surroundings, a manifestation of something ineffably sad—a racial misfit. It looked as though the end of a tragic human drama was not far off. These people had not the adaptability to turn to agriculture, or to adopt any of the activities which enable mankind to flourish. The Mexican authorities had on more than one occasion pointed the way, but the Seris, or at least these who now lived in complete isolation, had not understood. In the natural scheme of things they had chosen as their home one of the least hospitable areas of the American continent, where only an extremely vigorous or highly adaptable savage could multiply. The record of the last half century certainly seemed to show that these people had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. All this passed through my mind, while we were on that remote and inhospitable beach, under the scorching sun. Afterwards I sobered up a little, cut some of the tragedy from my mental scenario and revised certain ideas.

Thomson told us that Romero's group was at present living not far away, on the shores of a small hidden bay, called Santa Rosa. We presented the quartet with a sack of *frijoles* and re-embarked. They did not thank us. But then the Seri language contains no equivalent of thanks, and Seris do not appreciate the significance of words of thanks in Spanish either.

Having at last obtained first-hand information as to Chico Romero's present camp we were soon able to find it. The group had settled on a narrow isthmus, consisting of low dunes on which grew sparse mezquite and cactus, flanked by pebbly beaches. The two small, semi-permanent habitations were comparable with those previously seen, that is to say, untidy, extremely flimsy constructions, which offered protection only from above, having little or no lateral structure. Eighteen persons lived in these two small *jacales*, evidently in close harmony with at least a dozen dogs. Two of the Seri dug-out canoes lay a little way off on the beach.

With the notable exception of Chico Romero, whose portrait is reproduced, these people showed the same apathy and lack of interest on our arrival, as the men we had just left. Only the vigorous and strongly built leader rose from the interior of one of the *jacales* to greet us as we landed. Romero was throughout our short stay talkative and friendly. In rather incoherent and tumultuous though unmistakably obscene Spanish he was loud in his criticism of the *autoridades*. Most of the others, particularly the younger adults and the children, remained distant and incurious, even when I presented the community with the other half of the *frijoles*. Later, however, at my request four or five of the women painted their faces in their traditional manner, and posed with a good enough grace for their portraits.

Against the evidence of Romero's own robust health and the sleek fatness of the dogs, there were definite signs of malnutrition in several of the individuals of the group. I did not reach a definite conclusion as to the reason for this; the traditional, unbalanced Seri diet (predominantly of *totuava*<sup>1</sup> and turtle, and at best only half-cooked) is such that one wonders how these people can ever have maintained adequate health standards. As there are presumably no less fish and turtles in their area than previously, their present food situation is hard to explain. Romero insisted that they were near starvation as the *autoridades* had confiscated their rifles, thereby preventing them from hunting. Both McGee and Kroeber, however, state that the proportion of red meat in their normal diet is very

<sup>1</sup> A large gulf fish the identity of which I could not ascertain.

small, deer and other mammals being killed only occasionally. However demoralised man may be, hunger is the one factor calculated to move him to action, so this can hardly account for the fact that inadequate catches of fish and turtles are taken nowadays. Against this is McGee's considered reference to the Seris' incredible indolence. According to him, only genuine pangs of hunger could drive them to a superhuman effort to catch meat. This usually meant, on the mainland, poaching a cow, and killing and eating it on the spot with their hands, or, on Tiburon, doing the same thing to a deer, which would be chased and run down! A possible theory is that the firearms they later obtained had the effect of increasing their indolence, and, the necessity for *chasing* their prey having disappeared, their original fleetness of foot suffered. These weapons were confiscated by the authorities early in 1944, as it had been claimed that their owners were threatening *yori* with them.

In due course I submitted to the National Museum, as requested, a comprehensive report of all I had seen and heard, under various headings, such as statistics of the tribe, its living conditions, food and health, clothing, artifacts, language, face-painting, and other customs. But this is perhaps not the place for these rather technical details.

Señor Weitlaner had requested, for the museum, specimens of any artifacts I might obtain, but I returned to Mexico City with two things only—the turtle-bladder oil container already referred to, and a specimen of their rather simple, pleasing, basket-work—the only example that I saw. Formerly the tribe wore robes of pelican-skin and made blankets of sea-lion skins adroitly stitched together. But I saw neither of these articles; according to Romero, his people no longer club the pelicans on their rock-roosts at night, as formerly, and in any case pelican-skin robes are obsolete, supplanted by any nondescript unwanted *yori* apparel that the Seris can obtain. I saw no blankets at all in the *jacales*, so perhaps the same applies to the hunting of sea-lions. Is it possible to explain the discontinuance of these traditional tribal activities by the lamentable apathy and resignation that have beset these people?

The name "Seri" is not a Seri word at all, but is the name given to them (meaning, I believe, "fleet-footed") in the



language of the Yaquis or some other people in neighbouring territory. The Seris call themselves in their own tongue "Kunkaak", signifying something like "the people", and this name is also applied to the more easterly of the two barren *sierras* on Tiburon Island. Their language, distantly related to Indian tongues still spoken in Sonora, and to others formerly spoken on the Peninsula of Baja California, is very guttural, with exaggeratedly prolonged vowels and little tonic accent. I believe that not a single non-Seri speaks or understands it, and in recent times at least, only McGee has attempted a comparative vocabulary.

Until a very few years ago, the tribe remained absolutely self-contained, for intermarriage with *yoris* was unheard of and unthinkable. But Romero told me that "the people" have recently become slightly more tolerant on this point, and two Seri maidens have married in Bahía Kino, without their husbands being the object of the tribe's vengeance.

A young girl was prostrate with a high fever in one of the *jacales* and her elders were evidently concerned at her condition. I crawled in under the flimsy roof to see whether my limited medical knowledge would tell me anything. I could only suspect malaria, so I probably incurred uselessly the mute yet unmistakable suspicion and disapproval of the women around the sufferer. We had in any case no first-aid kit with us, so on our return to the "Guardacostas" we took in tow one of the canoes carrying Chico Romero and two other men, to whom we gave certain anti-malarial preparations from the ship's dispensary. Our visitors also asked for bread, coffee, old clothes and anything else we could spare. As soon as we had contributed whatever we could find, we set sail for Guaymas, and our last view of the Seris was the silhouettes of the three ragged Indians, each topped by his rather absurdly small felt hat, paddling their cumbersome craft laboriously and resignedly back to the inhospitable place whence they had come.

Whatever may or may not have been the strictly useful results of this visit to what McGee calls "Seriland", I should like to pay a sincere tribute to the extremely helpful attitude of the Mexican authorities towards my trip, and, in particular, to the officers and crew of the "Guardacostas 23", and to

General de Brigada Julio Hernandez Serrano at Hermosillo, for their courtesy, friendliness and hospitality.

### *Here and There*

I have written in some detail about my experiences and observations during two rather serious journeys, in contrasting and little-known parts of Mexico, but it would not be difficult for me to write as much again in lighter vein, on experiences in other regions of this vast kaleidoscopic country. And I believe that each such experience would offer enough new material for none to be mere repetition.

I remember vividly a sufficient variety of scenes, countrysides and associations to eradicate for ever the conventional and erroneous idea of a Mexico of sand, cacti, big hats and revolutions.

I remember an ascent of Ixtaccíhuatl involving a night with an Indian guide in a hollow of the rocks at the limit of trees, in a snow-storm that almost congealed our blood—the only occasion in Mexico on which I have felt really cold.

At the other end of the scale of memory, I recall a week on the tropical Isla del Carmen, off the coast of Campeche—covered with coconut palms and infested with sandflies—waiting for the elements to permit of my being taken off in an aeroplane.

Then there were visits to the glamorous Pacific resort of Acapulco (where nature has contributed a paradise, and man has contrived to produce one of the dirtiest and least pleasant human settlements I have seen) and the occasion on which I drew out of the calm blue Pacific a 10 feet 6 inch sail-fish, to my very great surprise.

I shall not forget finding myself at midnight in a car in the very centre of the Rio Tehuántepec, and having to search the countryside for a span of oxen to tow the vehicle out of this curious location, which it had attained because the driver had claimed—erroneously—to know exactly where the ford was.

Another remarkable experience was a flight in a Mexican

Air Force fighter along the unbelievably barren east coast of the Peninsula of Baja California, whose inhospitable aspect appears—from the air—lunar rather than earthly, an impression which is hardly dispelled when one lands.

We spent many pleasant days in the comfortable villas of friends in Cuernavaca, the sub-tropical near-Paradise which is Mexico City's playground, fifty miles to the south over the mountains.

The folly of a parched mule-trip at the hottest time of the year through the tropical forest in the hinterland of Vera Cruz, in search of a buried city, comes to mind with the less uncomfortable occasion on which I partook liberally with Mexican friends at a *tequila* distillery at Tequila in the State of Jalisco.

Mexico has a tremendous lot to offer; if she is a backward country, then I would say that, in common with most backward countries, the range of attractions widens in accordance with one's ability to tolerate lack of comfort. The Ministry of Communications, however, is constantly progressing with its vast road-building programme, and as new roads mean new hotels to attract tourists, the tendency is for relative comfort to be ever more widespread. But he who demands everywhere living conditions comparable with those of Europe or the United States is naturally sentenced to follow the madding crowd. He will still find a large assortment of attractive destinations from which to choose, but more adventurous and more inquisitive spirits will naturally have a much wider choice.

Motoring in Mexico, outside the turbulent streets of its capital, is normally a very pleasant experience, on condition that one keeps to the ever-widening network of the Carreteras Nacionales. These roads are excellently maintained, and much of their mileage is picturesque in the extreme, and would merit bright green shading on a Michelin map of the country, if such a thing existed. Distances, however, are so great, and petrol stations so infrequent, that it is as well to be very attentive to the petrol gauge, and the fastidious will for some years have to plan in advance at which place they will spend the night. A good rule is invariably to make an early start; not only is the early morning the most enchanting time of the

day in Mexico (as D. H. Lawrence said, in his *Mornings in Mexico*), but in many parts of the country one can usually count on clear weather until the afternoon, even at the height of the rainy season.

Whether the visitor be a motorist or not, and whatever his interests, I feel that a stay in Mexico which is spent exclusively in the capital, is unwise—in fact a Bad Thing. Mexico City has many attractions, but it is too cosmopolitan, up to date and mundane to be typical of the country or to give one any sort of idea of what the Republic is really like.

At the present time, any description of Mexico would be incomplete without some reference to that phenomenon which, since 1943, has caused hardship and misery to a number of country folk in the western State of Michoacan, and interest, and perhaps a thrill, to many *forasteros* from other parts of the land and from abroad, besides providing geologists and seismologists with material for serious study. I refer to Mexico's Paricutin, the world's youngest volcano.<sup>1</sup>

I planned several times to see Paricutin for myself, but the visit never materialised, and when I flew over it in a Mexican bomber, it remained invisible beneath thick clouds.

Its birth and systematic growth have been the subjects of several papers, both scientific and popular, in various parts of the world. The village of San Juan de las Colchas, otherwise known as Parangaricutiro, has long since disappeared under its lava, many Tarascan Indians have lost their homes, and the pilgrimages to this holy village have been for ever terminated. Volcanic dust has covered a wide area in all directions, which has had to be written off agriculturally. In contrast, the nearest town, Uruapan, has enjoyed a glut of tourists since February, 1943, when Paricutin was born out of a simple maize field that was actually being ploughed at the time.

General Lázaro Cardenas, the former President of Mexico, whose home is in the State of Michoacan, was mainly responsible for ensuring that the peasants who suffered most from Paricutin's

<sup>1</sup> Paricutin is not unprecedented. In September, 1759, another volcano was born, also in the state of Michoacan. This is Jorullo, which is located some forty miles south of Pátzcuaro. It is now extinct or dormant, but we are told that it remained in violent activity for five months, and in spasmodic eruption for the next seventeen years.

depredations were accommodated elsewhere and granted the means to earn their livelihood in less precarious surroundings.

Not being a seismologist, I prefer to make no predictions about Paricutin, but according to the latest information it is still in eruption and would still seem to be capable of making headline news.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE APPEAL OF THE OLD—A SPOT OF ARCHÆOLOGY

It may or may not be true that a special type of mentality is necessary to take archæology seriously. If it is so, then the comparatively large numbers of people in Mexico and Central America who dabble in this branch of science would seem to indicate that that part of the world constitutes an exception to the general rule.

I myself had never taken very great interest in archæology in Europe—in fact my only activities in that direction were of a dilettante nature, limited to visiting the *Alignements* of Carnac, photographing some of Minorca's enigmatic prehistoric stone constructions, and searching spasmodically for Phœnician figurines on the island of Ibiza.

But in Mexico and the Central American republics, the ancient backgrounds somehow seem to play a more important rôle in the national atmosphere than is the case in most European countries. The humanist with a penchant for classical Greek antiquities may well say (he has said so, many times) that the objects that come out of the Mexican and Central American earth cannot compare with the Greek in æsthetic or artistic value. With a few exceptions he is indisputably right, but the remains of the old American civilisations are not for that reason any less interesting than their Greek counterparts. On the contrary, our limited knowledge of their makers possibly heightens their interest. Moreover, the abundance of material available offers a very tangible attraction to the enthusiast, for anyone with sufficient time and a little knowledge can come upon hitherto hidden things which may be of considerable importance, and affect the whole history of the distant past in the region, as it is now generally accepted.

Once the archæological germ is born, one becomes either an ardent "pot-hunter", or, less commonly, a small asset to society in the shape of a serious student of archæology for archæology's sake.

In the case of Mexico particularly, such a large proportion of the literature available refers to the period before the Conquest, that the intelligent foreign visitor, reading about the country before arrival, comes to Mexico already on the alert expecting to see pre-Hispanic ruins, and often keen to pursue the matter farther.

Before the arrival of the first Europeans, mighty civilisations had come into being, flourished and already disappeared. Only the youngest of them—the Aztec and the Zapotec—were still at their height. By A.D. 1500 the decadence of the Mayan Empire was comparable in some respects with that of the Roman, eleven centuries earlier.

However excellent may have been the pre-Cortésian historical recorders, the difficulty of deciphering such codices as have remained available to scholars would alone have made enormous the task of putting everything into chronological order. Most of these documents may be said to have given a good measure of the information of which they are capable. The main sources of future knowledge of the subject can only be new finds and stratigraphical studies—that is, studies of sites which offer definite evidence of the chronological order of the material found, by reason of obvious superimposition of one layer on another.

The reconstruction of pre-Conquest history from the dawn of civilisation in Mexico is now making more progress than previously owing to intensified research on the part of trained archæologists. Knowledge is increasing snowballwise, and little by little it is becoming possible to answer questions that have remained unanswered for centuries and to correct earlier, inaccurate deductions and theories.

The pioneers in this direction were naturally the Spaniards—mostly priests—though the limitations of their archæological background rendered many of their theories untenable in the light of later scientific research. The lead in the last century was taken by occasional Americans and Englishmen; at the present time one might say that the Americans and Mexicans are progressing hand in hand, for experts of both countries are now carrying out a great deal of valuable research and study.

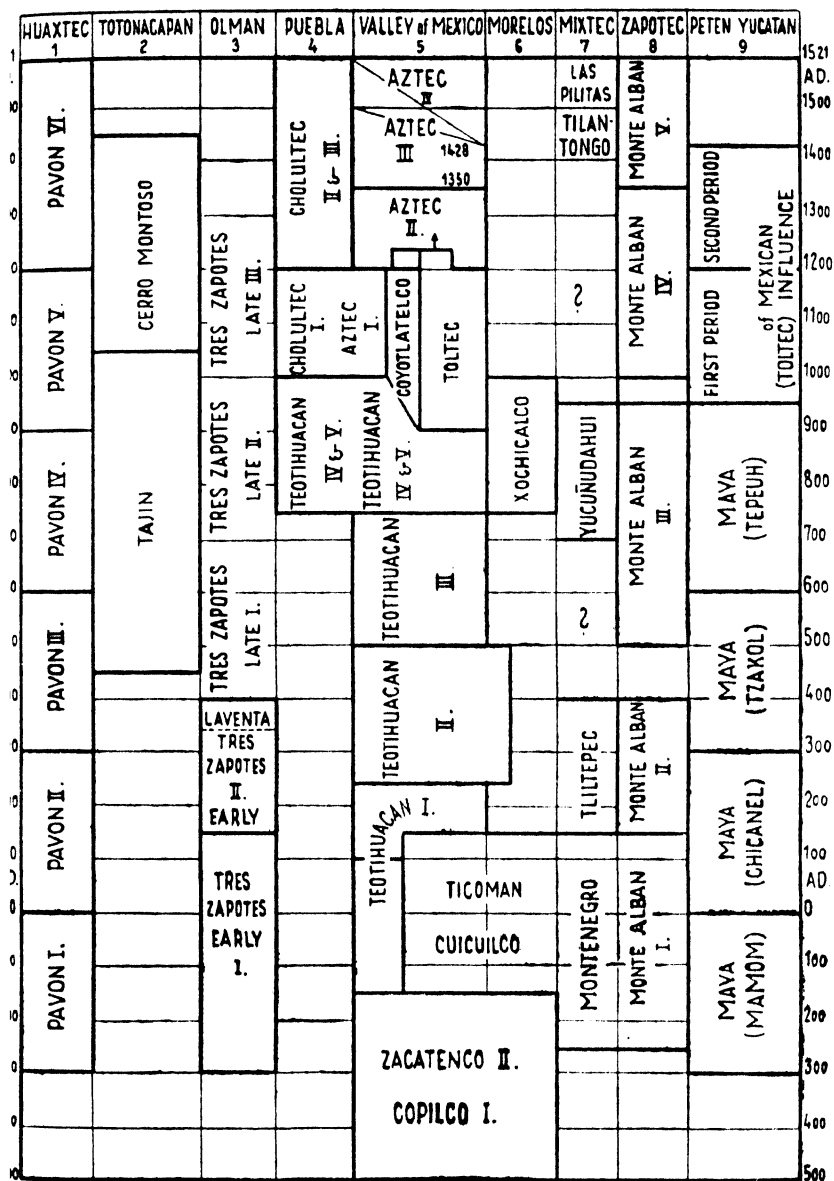


Chart to illustrate sequence of cultures flourishing in 9 main archaeological regions of Mexico.  
(According to Señor Wigberta Jimenez Moreno)



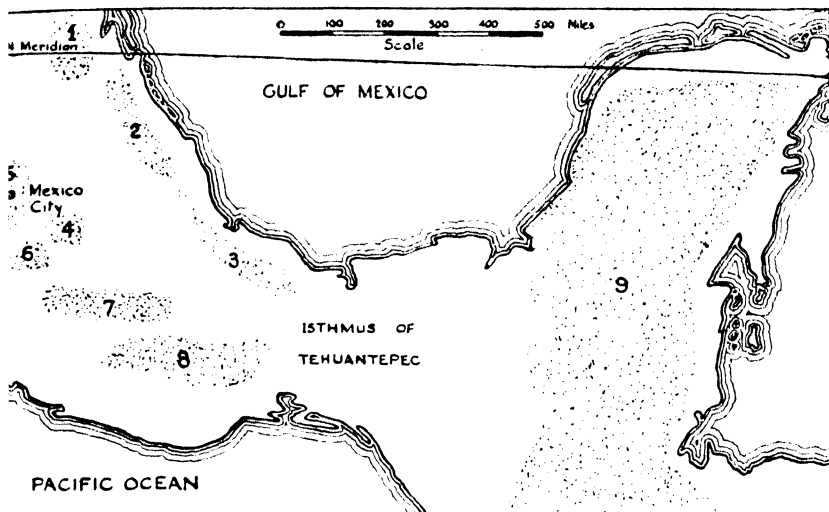
Of the Anglo-Saxons who have contributed, the names Kingsborough, Maudslay, Spence, Joyce and J. E. S. Thompson come to mind; the most notable Americans are probably J. L. Stephens, Morley, Vaillant, Spinden and Blom. Of the Mexicans, Caso, Acosta, Garcia Payon, Noguera, Palacios, Marquina and Covarrubias should be mentioned. Other notable Americanists who have specialised in Mexico's past are the Swede, S. Linne, the Frenchmen Rivet and Soustelle, and the Germans Preuss and Seler.

From the vague jumble of names of past "cultures" to which the interested tyro is obliged to listen, sooner or later a clearer historical picture emerges. Nevertheless, the impression is liable to be upset from time to time, as new theories of the sequence of events are propounded and accepted.

It is almost impossible to portray adequately in graphic form the migrations, flourishings and declines of the numerous peoples which make up the ensemble. The best one can do is to refer to a chronological table (such as the one on page 75) which indicates the now accepted sequence of the civilisations and cultures in the various regions which produced and nurtured the more highly developed peoples. The table reproduced here, which is by courtesy of Señor Wigberto Jimenez Moreno, attempts to avoid too much confusing detail. Its dates are of necessity very approximate indeed.

To many foreigners the name Mexico at once brings to mind the Aztecs. This is perhaps the proper place to say that the Aztec civilisation, of which a great deal of material is available for study, was in many respects inferior to the Teotihuacán and Toltec cultures that preceded it in Central Mexico. It is also generally accepted that the Maya civilisation, which was flourishing in the south-east many centuries before the Aztecs established themselves, was far more advanced in most respects. On the other hand it cannot be denied that the far-flung Aztec empire was an outstanding triumph of politico-military expansion.

Once more I must refer to meridian 21° N. Generally speaking, when the ancient civilisations, in their southward migrations, crossed this line, they discarded their nomadic and hunting habits, adopted agriculture, settled



Rough Sketch Map to show approximate positions of cultural regions

Schematic diagram of Mexico's pre-Cortesian horizons, in nine of the regions in which the cultures flourished (according to Don Wigberto Jimenez Moreno). Development in Western Mexico is omitted. The Tarascan, Colima and Nayarit civilisations present great difficulties of classification and dating. The figures below the areas named at the top of the diagram on page 75 refer to the above map

down, and were for the first time able to devote themselves to things other than the mere struggle for existence. Consequently there is considerably more of archæological interest to the south of meridian 21° than to the north of it.

The newcomer, unfamiliar with the products of the ancients, is almost certain to start off on the wrong foot if he is going to begin a collection of Mexican antiquities. I refer to fakes. Certain persons, shrewdly realising the profit to be made from tourists and others, have established a flourishing traffic in fakes, which are introduced to the unwary at such places as Teotihuacán. And as the pilgrimage to the temples and pyramids of Teotihuacán is usually one of the first trips that the visitor to the country undertakes, a large number of these *copias* are bought, and doubtless find their way to the United States and other foreign countries as well as to Mexican households. They are, however, unconvincing, and rarely

confuse an expert. (In Guatemala, unfortunately, this is not the case, for although fewer foreigners visit that country, there are Guatemalan imitators whose technique is of a very high order. Even experts are occasionally flummoxed by their products. Every subterfuge is used, including even the burial of the reproduction in the ground for a spell, so that on disinterment, it has a genuine earthy appearance!)

Reverting to the genuine article, however, the enthusiast would presumably pay an early visit to Mexico City's Museo Nacional, where the archæological collection is very fine. (As the Mexican government is now taking steps to prevent important pieces from leaving the country, the collection is likely to be still finer at some future date.)

In spite, however, of the quality of this official collection and of those at such places as Oaxaca and Campeche, it is probable that more than half the movable Mexican antiquities are in private hands within the country, or abroad.

Until recently many priceless items found their way to the United States, where the collections of the Heye Foundation, the University Museum of Philadelphia and the Smithsonian Institute are in some respects even richer than those in Mexico itself. In Europe, London, Vienna, Berlin, Stockholm and Leyden, among other places, have, or had, numerous very fine exhibits, not to mention those treasures that have been in Spanish museums since the earlier part of the Colonial period.

The export of important pieces is, however, a thing of the past. A law is now in operation, according to which collections or individual pieces leaving the country must be shown to the Instituto de Antropología, which permits only those to leave which are of no importance either for study or for exhibition.

The output of the Mexican earth in respect of antiquities is, as I have said, considerable, and there is no sign whatever that its resources are drying up. During the three years of my stay, I recall the following major finds:

In 1942 an archaic site at Tlatilco, near the capital, began to produce an amazing quantity of interesting material, as the clay-diggers of a local brickworks extended their operations.

In 1943 excavations which had been going on at Tula, in the

State of Hidalgo, were intensified, and revealed Toltec remains of importance.

In 1944 a shallow archaic cemetery was uncovered in the open country at Xalostoc, a few miles to the north-west of the capital, various caches of Mayan jewellery were found in the State of Chiapas, and an enigmatic figure came to light embedded in the Pedregal lava-field, immediately to the south of the capital. This last find revived a thirty-five-year-old controversy as to the relationship between the age of the culture to which it belonged and that of the lava-field itself.

In 1945 a site was uncovered near Ixtlan del Río, in the western State of Nayarit, which disgorged interesting objects, and the first building (in the narrowest sense of the word) attributed to the Colima culture was found in the state of that name. Finally, a frieze in relief was discovered on the Toltec Pyramid of Tula, and new frescoes uncovered at Teotihuacán.

In Mexico City itself excavation of a previously hidden *teocalli* (pyramid) was started in the suburb of Tlaltelolco, and various items emerged from beneath a demolished house in the Calle de Guatemala, immediately behind the Cathedral. The discoveries at Tlaltelolco showed that the earliest constructions there were of Chichimec origin, and that the Aztecs later continued work on them.

I mention the finds about which I recall having heard. If an idol is ploughed up by an Indian in the State of Vera Cruz, the news is unlikely to reach the capital. And when one adds that in such areas as the Mixtec region of Oaxaca and the low-lying country behind the port of Vera Cruz, there are innumerable burial-mounds which the Government has had neither the time nor the money to open, it will be doubly clear that the Mexican earth still holds many treasures. They may in due course contribute to man's knowledge of what happened in that part of America long before the coming of the first European.

The earliest archæological writings naturally referred to the more ostentatious ruins—to those of the Mayas, and to others which were at first attributed to the Aztecs. Later it was acknowledged that not the Aztecs, but some earlier people had built the pyramids at Teotihuacán. Little by little, Zapotec, Totonac and Tarascan remains were found and identified.

As one example of the modern revolution of thought, it was not realised until around 1910 that an "archaic" civilisation had existed in and around the Valley of Mexico, older than all the others in the area, flourishing around the time of Christ, or before. Almost all that is known of these people—for the primitive pyramid of Cuicuilco is the only one of their buildings which is known—is the result of study of their ceramics, which have since been discovered in great quantity at various places around the capital. A relationship with a roughly contemporaneous culture from farther east, known vaguely as Olmec, has since been established, though archæologists are vague about the Olmecs, if such a people ever indeed existed.

At most of the archaic sites it has been possible to learn a great deal from stratigraphy, as the layers are well defined.

Knowledge of these cultures dates from some thirty-five years ago, when a Mrs. Nuttall came upon a figurine below the lava cap at the edge of the Pedregal lava field. This was indeed an epoch-making discovery, which caused opinions to be revised as to the age of the lava-field, and showed very clearly that the builders of the Teotihuacán pyramids were by no means the first civilised humans to live in the area.

Another *volte-face* is the new conviction that Teotihuacán was not the capital of the Toltecs, as had previously been assumed. It is now accepted that Tula was one of the main Toltec centres, and that Teotihuacán was not built by the Toltecs, but by some earlier people whose technique influenced building and pottery over a wide area. The age of the Teotihuacán pyramids can be estimated (any date between A.D. 300 and 900 is possible) only approximately and as they appear to be the most brilliant manifestation of this civilisation's activities, all examples of its technique are referred to as being of the "Teotihuacán culture".

Yet a further example of change of ideas concerns the west of the country. Until recently everything found in the States of Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Michoacán and Guanajuato was attributed to the Tarascans, but experts now consider that the plentiful and highly individual material from Colima and Nayarit was not made by Tarascans at all, but by entirely differ-



Chico Romero, formerly  
chief of the Seris. (page 66)



The abandoned Seri "houses" at  
Punta Chueca. (page 62)



Maria and the blind woman.



Three small Seri maidens.

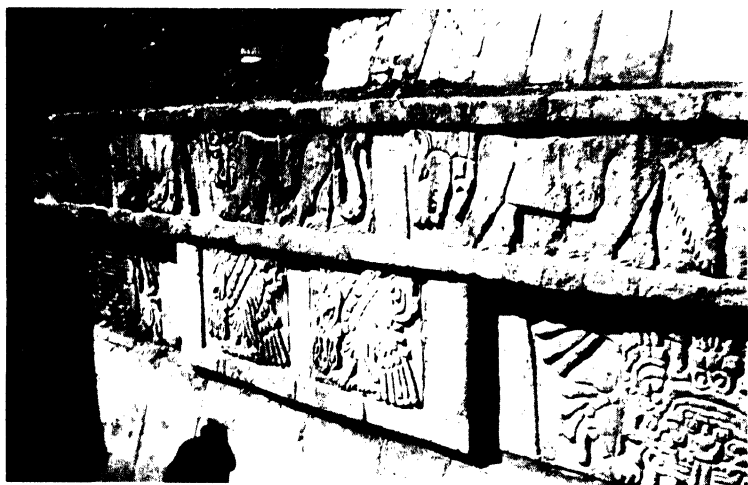
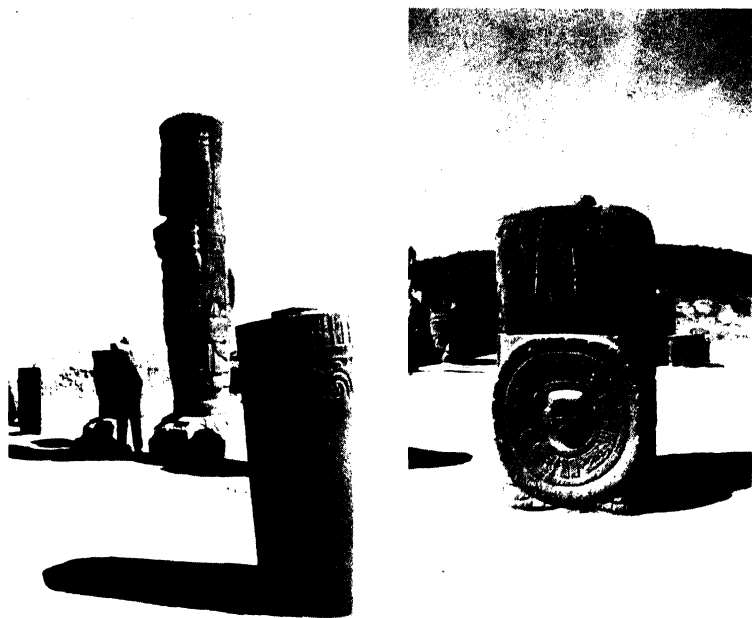


Views of the young volcano, Parícutín, taken late in 1943. *page 71*



The author's collection of archaic heads and figurines from  
Tlatilco, Federal District. *page 81*





*Top.* Views of the colossal stone figures at Tula (Hidalgo), the supposed religious capital of the Toltecs. (page 80)

*Below.* A Toltec frieze recently uncovered at Tula. (page 80)

ent peoples who lived possibly a good deal earlier. Very many pots and figurines have been found in these two states, yet less is known of their makers than of the civilisations in other parts of the country. Hardly any buildings have been discovered, and until recently little stratigraphical work was possible. The person who knows more about the past in western Mexico than anybody else is Miss Isabel Kelly, an American lady who has devoted several years to serious and energetic archæological work in the area.

This is only a superficial review of Mexican archæology, and a catalogue of all the types of objects and figures that have come to light would be out of place here. Nevertheless a brief reference to the most noteworthy and characteristic forms will I think, be of some interest.

The distribution of prehistoric arrow-heads, axe-heads, flints and obsidian knives is very widespread, and indeed this is the case right down the Central American isthmus. I have heard that Yucatan, however, is devoid of such material.

The *metate* is another almost ubiquitous object, and its presence in most strata emphasises the importance of maize to all these peoples. The *metate* is a heavy stone object on which maize was ground, and is still in use to-day all over rural Mexico. Although there are numerous varieties, the most common form may be said to be tripedal and without adornment. Elaborate "ceremonial *metates*" are found farther south, in Central America, particularly in Costa Rica, where they are attributed to the Huatar civilisation.

The Mexican archaic civilisation around the Valley of Mexico was most prolific in small clay figurines and other forms of pottery. The most numerous and most perfect (though not the oldest) type is that which the late George Vaillant has classified as "D1" or "Pretty Lady". Examples of this type from my own collection of Tlaltilco finds are shown in the lowest section of the accompanying photograph. The features are finely executed, the sensibility of the artist must have been considerable, and the detail and realism of the head-gear and other adornments have given us a probably faithful indication of the manner of living of these otherwise unknown

people. The earliest types were made individually, and the use of the mould was learned later.

The large-scale production of these figurines has made it difficult to answer the question "What object did they serve?", but Vaillant, after discarding various other possibilities, expressed the view that they were most likely the equivalent of the Roman *lares et penates*—that is, they were individual household gods which were possibly renewed at frequent intervals for reasons that we shall never know.

Perhaps contemporaneous with these are the enigmatic and variable objects found from time to time in the southern State of Guerrero. Nothing is known of their makers, except that they were good artisans in jade, jadeite (or nephrite) and other sorts of stone, from which they fashioned a heterogeneous series of figurines, idols and masks.

The Teotihuacán people, besides erecting their impressive religious buildings, made superb serpentine, alabaster, jade, stone and clay death-masks, and numerous pots and clay figurines. The style and features of the latter, however, are in strong contrast with the "Pretty Ladies" and other archaic forms made in much the same area several hundred years before.

The small products of the Mayas are, as one would expect, of infinite variety. The range seems to increase as one enters the Central American area, where the "Old Empire" flourished. From Mexican territory probably the finest pieces come from Palenque, in Chiapas, and the burial island of Jaina, off the coast of Campeche. Outstanding ornamental techniques are those on polychromed, relief and incised pots, some of which are extremely beautiful. Mayan work, whether on buildings or on small objects, is in strong contrast with that of the Aztecs, being generally graceful, subtle and soft, while Aztec motifs are fiercely vigorous.

The antiquities of Vera Cruz, on Mexico's east coast, are from a complex assortment of cultures. The so-called Olmec archaic jades and stone carvings are outstanding, as are also clay figurines of a type known as "Baby-face", attributed to them.

The Totonac civilisation of the Vera Cruz region produced several characteristic articles, of which the most interesting are

perhaps the finely sculpted stone "yokes", the use of which has never been satisfactorily explained. Another important product of the region is a clay figure with a smiling face. Whilst some authorities attribute these to the Totonacs, others hesitate to do so. These *caras sonrientes* are unique, for no other pre-Columbian peoples are known to have moulded faces with a smile. The expression is somewhat enigmatic, wise and spiritual, and the mocking, impish or ironical expressions of certain "happy" oriental figures one has seen, are absent in these Vera Cruz heads.

The elegant Totonac art may be said to represent to some extent a fusion of Mayan grace with Aztec rugged violence.

The Mixtec and Zapotec civilisations of the State of Oaxaca each left works of art according to their respective techniques.

The Mixtecs were clever jewellers, and worked gold, rock-crystal, jade, turquoise and other stones. The Mixtec section in the museum at Oaxaca contains some of the most beautiful things ever found on the American continent. These people also made ceramics and polychrome pottery, but the commonest things from the area are rather crudely cut incised limbless figurines of small size, fashioned from material varying from the best American jade, through all grades of jadeite to ordinary stone. These carvings were used as pendants, and hung around the neck on some string-like material that was threaded through a transverse hole in the back.

The Zapotecs excelled in clay-moulding. The most elaborate, interesting and typical form of this is found in the funerary urns which have been discovered only in tombs in the Zapotec region. A considerable number and variety of these urns has been found. They are really statues rather than vessels, for the hollow part is insignificant and is eclipsed by the ornamental figure which usually extends almost two-thirds of the way around the urn's outside perimeter. The adornment of the figures, and particularly of their head-dresses, is often most elaborate, and the execution of it points to a high order of craftsmanship.

It is known that the Zapotec country formed a link for trade and culture between the Mayan lands and the centre of Mexico, and it is therefore not surprising that some of these urns show

Mayan influence in their adornment. In point of fact it is the earlier examples that have this characteristic; later, when the Zapotecs reached their period of highest artistic creativeness, an entirely Zapotec style was evolved, and Mayan inspirations were abandoned.

One of the best collections in the world is the Paulson collection, now in the Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, in Stockholm.<sup>1</sup>

These urns can be claimed as works of art by any standards, though it is undeniable that their bizarre pagan force and utterly alien concepts may at first jar the susceptibilities of a connoisseur of Greek Art at its best.

The civilisations of the west, to which I have already referred, produced material for posterity which is in many respects utterly different from that of the other peoples of Mexico. The Tarascans in Michoacán and Guanajuato, and the now extinct peoples of Colima and Nayarit, can be taken as one group, in that they produced with great simplicity and yet individuality terracotta figures which often represented humorously what appear to be ordinary people doing ordinary things. The emphasis is on the popular, instead of the hieratical. There is nothing religious, or formal, or menacing about most of these figures, which are bold in outline, and original in concept. These peoples also made polychrome pots and terracottas which retain a very high patina, and it is believed that their clay-baking process was different from that in use in other parts of the country.

Very fascinating are the so-called "*Izcuintles*", which are a relic of the Colima civilisation. These people, it is believed, used to eat the native hairless dogs, and they buried their more important dead in deep graves, in company with clay effigies of this item of their diet. The most acceptable theory is that these clay dogs were intended as a symbolic food ration for the departed, on his journey to wherever he happened to be destined. Colour is lent to this hypothesis by the fact that the dogs are always extremely fat—they are indeed so absurdly corpulent as to be almost a caricature. There is no indication

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, by S. Linne, published by the Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, Stockholm.

of the animal's sex in most cases, but the idea that they represent bitches about to pup is refuted by one example which is only too obviously a male dog. And he is certainly no thinner than his ordinary, less realistic associates.

These "*Izcuintles*" have attained great popularity with collectors. They are cleverly and solidly made, no two being exactly the same. The clay of which they are fashioned remains, after firing, a rich warm red, and a high polish is usually retained, or can be revived if the figure has accumulated the dirt of ages on its surface. Most of these dogs are in a standing position, but occasionally sitting or curled-up examples are found. Some are hollow, and others solid, and many have a small vase-like opening in the back or the tail. The artist Diego Rivera is reputed to possess the largest collection of them in existence—well over a hundred. In Mexico City, in 1945, I was able to find only two for sale, and the prices asked were from 250 to 500 pesos (£12 10s. to £25).<sup>1</sup>

There is only one more important culture-group to mention—the Aztec. The Aztecs produced stone and clay objects in great variety. The stone ones are frequently fierce and æsthetically unattractive representations of their numerous gods, i.e., idols, but the highest artistic level is reached in some of the later Aztec polychrome ceramics, made not long before the Conquest. The Aztecs also produced fine turquoise-inlay work and elaborate feather head-dresses.

Finally, there is one isolated source of pottery, attributed to a long-disappeared people who lived in the extreme north of Mexico, near Casas Grandes, in the State of Chihuahua. In style their work is different from anything else found in Mexico, consisting as a rule of pots, figures, and the like, in bold contrasting colours, with a buff background. This fine pottery represents a transition between that of the northern and that of the southern civilisations. It is by no means plentiful.

A domestic article common to almost all these "cultures" is the *molcajete*, a round, tripedal, more or less shallow clay vessel, sometimes primitive and simple, but occasionally ornate and embellished in polychrome.

<sup>1</sup> The British Museum collection includes one of these, which is at present still in its war-time hide-out.

As I have already said, there are innumerable places south of the twenty-first meridian where there are pre-Hispanic ruins, of one sort or another, either excavated, in process of excavations known but still covered up, or undiscovered. I myself came upon the untouched remains of what may have been an important religious city, in 1945, in a remote part of the State of Vera Cruz. Only the local people knew of it, and no official cognisance was taken of its existence.

Meanwhile the trees and other growths that had taken root on the sides and tops of the mounds that cover several acres are slowly but surely disintegrating the structures beneath. There are so many parts of Mexico which, virtually without communications, are well known only to the local country people, that this particular find is probably far from unique.

The more important and better-known ancient ruins are not sufficiently numerous for a list to be unwieldy. The alphabetical list which follows makes no pretence to be complete, but it does contain the sites which it is most worth making a journey to see, and which will give a general idea of pre-Hispanic buildings of all cultures:

No.	Place	Description	Civilisation	Remarks
1	Calixtlahuaca (State of Mexico)	Pyramid, only slightly excavated	Matlatzinca (?)	
2	Chichen Itzá (Yucatán)	Whole Mayan city of considerable extent, with pyramid	New Mayan Empire	First described in English, I believe, by Stephens, around 1842
3	Cholula (State of Puebla)	Enormous earth-covered pyramid, topped by Christian church	Toltec, but showing other influences	
4	Cuicuilco (Pedregal, in the Distrito Federal)	Small primitive archaic pyramid, built before the lava flow	Archaic	Generally considered to be the oldest building on the American Continent

No.	Place	Description	Civilisation	Remarks
5	Huexotla (State of Mexico)	Vestiges of a town	Texcocan, or Colhua	
6	Marlinalco (State of Mexico)	Various structures and rock-hewn temple	Pre-Aztec (?)	
7	Mitla (State of Oaxaca)	Holy city	Zapotec	In excellent preservation
8	Monte Albán (State of Oaxaca)	Holy city on a hill-top	Zapotec, with Mixtec influence	
9	Palenque (State of Chiapas)	Extensive Mayan city	Old Mayan Empire	
10	Tajín, near Papantla (State of Vera Cruz)	Special type of niched pyramid, with ancillary buildings	Tajín culture (?)	Only one other pyramid of this type is known — that at Yohualinchán in the same region
11	Tenayuca (Distrito Federal)	Pyramid dedicated to Quetzalcoatl	Chichimec origins, Aztec superstructures	There is another smaller pyramid close by at a place called Santa Cecilia
12	Teopanzolco, near Cuernavaca (State of Morelos)	Pyramid	Matlatzinca origins (?) Aztec superstructure	
13	Tepozteco, near Tepoztlán (State of Morelos)	Miniature pyramid perched on crag high in the mountains	Pre-Aztec (?)	
14	"Cerro Tlaloc", high in the Sierra Nevada, north of the Pass of Rio Frio (State of Mexico)	Remains of temple (?)	Questionable, but probably used by various peoples who worshipped the rain god "Tlaloc"	
15	Tlaltelolco (Mexico City)	Bases of two pyramids now being excavated	Chichimec origins, Aztec superstructures	



No.	Place	Description	Civilisation	Remarks
16	Tula (State of Hidalgo)	Pyramid and stone statues	Toltec	Supposed to have been the Toltecs' religious capital
17	Teotihuacán (State of Mexico)	Extensive holy city, with two gigantic pyramids <sup>1</sup>	Teotihuacán	The most visited and most impressive ruins in the country
18	U x m a l (Yucatán)	Extensive city, with pyramid	New Mayan Empire	See Stephens's account, 1842
19	Xochicalco (State of Guerrero)	Religious city on hill-top, with small sculpted pyramid	Toltec	Mr. Latrobe described this site as it was in 1824, in his book published two years later, <i>Ramblér in Mexico</i>
20	Zempoala (Vera Cruz)	Vestiges of religious city	Totonac (?) with Aztec influence (?)	

Many minor Mayan sites in the Yucatan peninsula

<sup>1</sup> The three main buildings are: an enormous pyramid (180 feet high) now known as the Pyramid of the Sun or *Tonatiuh*; the smaller Pyramid of the Moon, or *Mextli*; and the "Citadel," which includes the "Temple of Quetzalcoatl". The names *Tonatiuh* and *Mextli* are those of the Aztec Sun and Moon gods respectively.

In addition to these, I feel that I should mention a lone enigmatic idol, known generally as the *Idolo de Coatlinchán*, though called by the inhabitants of Coatlinchán—the nearest village—*La Piedra de los Tecomates* (the Stone of the Holes). This rather grim monolith lies deep in a remote *barranca* (gorge), about three miles due east of Coatlinchán, which is not far from the town of Texcoco. No road goes near the place, and a hot and dusty walk, first through *maguery* fields, and later over rocky hills, is necessary to reach it. It really lies in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada, due west from the "Cerro Tlaloc" temple referred to in the above list.

The Idol of Coatlinchán, which is shown in the accompanying photograph, is considered to be an effigy of Tlaloc, the rain god of the Nahuatl-speaking peoples, because the holes that form his mouth are a familiar characteristic in this god's numerous representations. The figure is horizontal, foreshortened, stylised, and grotesque. The theory that it was cast down from the Tlaloc temple is untenable, as the latter is at least three miles away in a direct line. The rock from which the idol was hewn has a narrower, seemingly tapering shaft below, and the depth of this shaft has never been ascertained, although it has been dug out to the extent of about three feet. The figure alone has a bulk much the same as that of a Churchill tank, and one calculation of its weight (disregarding the shaft) is well over 150 tons. These considerations would seem to offer a convincing argument that the idol was not brought there from elsewhere, but that the sculpture was undertaken on the uppermost, projecting piece of a huge deep-lying boulder. The fact that the nearest rocks are not of exactly the same material does not really prove anything.

No one will venture an opinion as to the age of this grim and puzzling figure, nor attempt to identify the culture to which it owes its origin.

The pyramids to which I have so frequently referred in this chapter call for some little comment, because the basic significance of the American pyramid is different from that of its old-world counterpart. The Egyptian pyramid was merely a tomb for the illustrious; the American pyramid was an elaborate altar. On its summit was normally a small building that served as a dwelling place for the priests dedicated to whatever polytheistic faith was practised by the tribe or race concerned. Most of these superstructures are now missing, or partially so. It was in front of them that the bloody orgies took place (particularly in the case of the Aztecs), for here the priests slaughtered the human sacrifices to appease Huitzilopochtli and such other gods of the local pantheon as demanded this tribute.

The majority of the peoples in the area practised human sacrifice to some extent, but the Aztecs exaggerated the practice to such a degree that historians have expressed their

conviction that, had there been no Conquest, the empire would have exhausted its own resources by this means before very long.

Some of the pyramids in the centre of the country show in their construction a relationship to the time calculations of their builders, in that their outermost walls conceal smaller, earlier pyramids. In the case of the pyramid at Tenayuca, for example, it has been possible to lay open several such constructions one within the other, and it is accepted that each was built above and around the last at periods of fifty-two years, each new construction coinciding with the great feasts held at the end of each fifty-two years cycle. And as different ceramic types and other objects were encountered within each pyramid, it was a simple matter to date them to the nearest fifty-two years. The outside structures at Tenayuca are Aztec, but the original core is attributed to the earlier Chichimec race. This is not the only instance of one civilisation building on or around monuments left by earlier peoples.

The different Indian religions had more in common than polytheism, ritual human sacrifices and pyramids. The more advanced races, such as the Mayas, Zapotecs and Aztecs, all evolved complex ritual calendrical systems (known as *tzolkin* to the Mayas, and as *tonalamatl* to the Aztecs), and an important figure in the pantheon of each was a serpent that took various guises, according to region and period.

The Aztecs, whose religion is believed to have evolved out of the creed of their predecessors, the Toltecs (and of the people of Teotihuacán, before them) placed their serpent-god very high up in their hierarchy of deities, though Aztec mythology is confusing as to his exact identity. He appears in three guises; sometimes he is a feathered serpent; sometimes a tall bearded man of the white race; and sometimes the greatest of the Toltec chiefs, who was high priest of Tula. Known usually as Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent), he is a benevolent and beneficent character, and in his reptilian guise he is a very common theme on Aztec sculptures, often stylised and almost unrecognisable.

In his guise of a white man, he is believed to have appeared among the people in Toltec times, and to have done much

good. When he died it was believed that he would one day return. According to the historians, the Emperor Moctezuma was for long unable to make up his mind how to deal with Hernan Cortés, whom he suspected of being the reincarnation of Quetzalcoatl.

The leading ornamental motifs on the "temple" at Teotihuacán, and on the Xochicalco pyramid (both of which were built before Aztec times) are this selfsame Quetzalcoatl in his snake-guise.

The Mayas had their serpent-god too, and called him Kukulcan. There is a similar character in the mythology of the Quiche race in Guatemala, known as Gukumats.

The most powerful member of the Aztec pantheon was Tezcatlipoca, or "Shining Mirror"—the god of Hell—but the deity whom the Aztecs considered it necessary to appease with their gruesome and continuous human sacrifices was Huitzilopochtli.<sup>1</sup> He was their war god, and the local god of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. The last member of the quartet of leading Aztec gods was Tlaloc, the god of rain, to whom I have already referred.

This chapter would be incomplete without a further reference to the Mayan civilisation. The cultural level which the Mayas achieved offers material for one of the most fascinating studies that it is possible to undertake. Authors have dubbed the Mayas the "Greeks of America" (the Aztecs being the "Romans"), and other authors of a more puristic turn of mind have disagreed with this comparison. But all admit that the scientific and artistic attainments of the Mayas were remarkable, even in comparison with Greek standards.

In the realm of science alone, these people, at the time of the earliest recorded date of their monuments, had already a considerable knowledge of mathematics including the use of zero, had evolved a complex self-compensating calendar system, had studied astronomy so thoroughly that they knew

<sup>1</sup> The Conquistadores were unable to pronounce the name of this god, and he is referred to as "Huichilobos", by Bernal Diaz del Castillo in his eye-witness account of the Conquest. The name Cuernavaca is another example of the Spaniards' linguistic shortcomings. The town's original name was Cuahnáhuac, which means "near the forest". It has nothing to do with a cow's horn, as the modern name suggests.

about the movements of Venus, and could even predict eclipses, and had devised their complicated ideographic system of writing.

A student of the Mayas cannot, however, limit his attention to Mexico, for about 2,500 years ago the race was civilising itself in a wide area which embraces parts of what are now Guatemala, the Republic of Honduras, British Honduras, the Mexican State of Chiapas, and the western fringe of El Salvador. To follow intelligently the chronological sequence of Mayan development, it is therefore most desirable to visit such places as Copán (in the Republic of Honduras), Quiriguá, Tikal and Uaxactún (in Guatemala), and Palenque (in Chiapas), before seeing the later cities of Chichen Itzá and Uxmal, in Yucatán. For we know that the Mayas enjoyed two separate and contrasting periods of glory, generally referred to as the Old Empire and the New Empire.

The leading authorities on the Mayas have succeeded in deciphering about a third of the Old Empire hieroglyphic inscriptions, and it seems that the earliest date yet found and deciphered corresponds, according to some experts, with 6th May, 98 B.C., though there is still some diversity of opinion as to the exact relationship between the Mayan and the Christian calendars. It is believed that the counting of days began on 6th August, 613 B.C. Even if there were no reason to think this, the perfection of the complex hieroglyphs used for recording the day 6th May, 98 B.C., would infer that the Mayas were already civilised some centuries before Christ, for such an evolved sort of writing could not have been developed overnight.

Generally speaking, age and climate erosion, humidity, and strong tropical plant-growth, have jointly ensured that to-day Old Empire buildings are in a relatively poor state of preservation. Indeed, a good deal of reconstruction has been necessary to save them from complete disintegration.

But the Old Empire "stelæ" (i.e., monolithic monuments, profusely adorned with hieroglyphs in relief, among other things) are, in respect of data for study, more eloquent and informative than the buildings. Their sculpture is one of the most wonderful pre-Hispanic things in all America.

Almost the sole object of erecting these stelæ was to commemorate dates—not historical dates, be it mentioned, but purely ceremonial dates marking calendar periods. This flair for time-calculation appears to have been merely a means to an end, for the elaborate Mayan calendar really served as an aid to agriculture. It seems as though these people were very conscious of the fact that they were the first people to benefit from maize cultivation. It seems as though they were fanatically determined to prosecute agriculture with the maximum efficiency with the aid of a realistic, scientific and workable calendrical system. Their efforts in the latter direction led them on to astronomy and abstractions, for which they now had time to spare, as maize had obviated the necessity for hunting and eased the struggle for existence.

The stelæ themselves are impressive and graceful, and many are in an excellent state of preservation. Most are adorned on one or two sides with colossal human figures in priestly vestments or those of gods, the remaining sides being as a rule covered with the hieroglyphic inscriptions. Some of the best examples of stelæ are at Quiriguá and at Copán, two cities which were roughly contemporary with one another. The setting at Quiriguá is exquisite. Some time in the last century a dense tropical forest covered the whole area, but after herculean labours on the part of a number of people, the site was cleared sufficiently to give access to the buildings and stelæ, and it is thought that the place's present aspect (apart from the condition of the buildings) is much as it was at the height of its glory. I know of no more impressive thing than these enormous mellowed monoliths, in a verdant clearing, surrounded by forest giants and dense undergrowth, from which the screaming of macaws and parrots and the chattering of monkeys assail the ear. The relative eloquence or enigmatic quality of the monuments naturally depends on the degree of learning of the visitor, but I would venture the opinion that in any case these stelæ have won over many a visitor for American studies, who, before seeing them, had considered archæology in America less attractive or satisfying than the same activities in the old world.

At the apogee of the Old Mayan Empire, probably in the seventh century A.D., the cities were abandoned one after the other, and a mass exodus northwards took place. It is believed that it was completed in about fifty years. There has been much speculation as to the cause of this migration. Most people accept the theory that it was due to some form of agricultural necessity. Whatever may have been the reason, from the deep forests of the Petén and the neighbouring regions away they went, and settled in the "land of the pheasant and the deer", as the Peninsula of Yucatán is called. Centuries later the cities of Chichen Itzá, Uxmal, and many others, were flourishing in this northern region, which really may be said to extend from the Caribbean coast of Quintana Roo to the easternmost end of the Laguna de Términos, in the State of Campeche.

The habit of erecting stelæ to commemorate dates disappeared, and the cities of the New Empire consist for the most part of magnificent buildings of a religious character—temples, pyramids, ball-courts and observatories, with great attention paid to architectural style, line, and such æsthetic considerations as the staggering of levels. There are proofs of cultural and architectural influence from highland Mexico (and particularly from Tula) in these New Empire cities, and for over 200 years what was really a Toltec-Maya state was in existence.

Anita Brenner, in a summary of the Mayan civilisations, uses a happy phrase in comparing the respective decorative motifs of the Old and the New Empires, when she says: "The favourite old Maya figure is a wise silky priest; the new Maya theme, a young athletic warrior, with feathers in his hair. And whereas the Old Mayas seemed chiefly occupied with abstractions and with the stars, New Mayas go in for ball-games and battles."

About a century before the arrival of the Spaniards, this second glorious period waned, though not through conquest. The reasons for the decay of the New Mayan Empire must, it seems, remain conjectural. When the Spaniards first landed, in 1517, Yucatán was still quite densely populated, and its inhabitants were highly organised politically, though divided up into small groups each under its own *cacique*. The old holy

cities were abandoned, and no buildings comparable with theirs were still being erected.

The conquest of Yucatán was begun in 1526, and by 1542 the country was finally subdued. Yucatán became a *Capitanía General* of the Spanish Empire, independent both of the viceroyalty of Mexico (Nueva España) and of the Captaincy-General of Guatemala. Yucatán's Indians ceased to rule their own destinies. But at least one independent Mayan community (the Itzas) lived on farther south. This autonomous entity continued to exist until as late as 1697, when the Governor of Yucatán, Martín de Ursua y Arizmendi conquered it on the island of San Andrés, in the lake known as Petén Itzá, the largest sheet of water in the remote northern region of Guatemala. A fortified Colonial village soon arose, which is known now as Flores.

Since then the Mayas have been only once front-page news. Around 1846, i.e., after the Declaration of Mexican Independence, and following on strife between the Yucatecan *criollos* and the rest of Mexico on the issue of autonomy for Yucatán, the Mayas rose up against their *criollo* masters, and a bloody civil war followed. They were finally subdued, and since then may be said to have lived very close to the earth, as peaceable agriculturists, maintaining their own peculiar way of living, which involves the universal use of sleeping hammocks and small thatched houses of a form not found elsewhere.

This chapter was begun in a light vein, with an endeavour to look at archæology in Mexico from the view-point of the beginner. But it seems to have developed into a serious, if superficial, review of the whole subject. To revert, however, to the collector, or would-be collector, of Mexican antiquities, I would add a few words of guidance.

The number of dealers in pre-Hispanic pieces in Mexico City can be counted on the fingers of one hand, although there is a plethora of dealers in Colonial and foreign art. Those few who specialise in the oldest things, however, now generally ask extremely high prices. A search of the markets of Mexico City is not likely to be fruitful, although odd things may appear from time to time on Sunday mornings in the Lagunilla Market.

From experience I can say that, if personal excavations are not



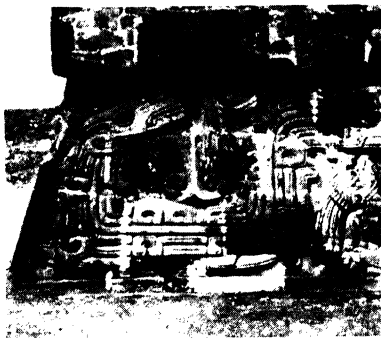
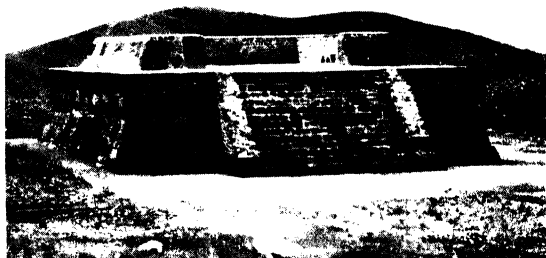
envisaged, the best way to collect is to get out into the country, and particularly to those parts of it which are "archæological regions". In most villages in these parts small boys usually know who, if anybody, has anything of this sort to sell. If a village has a mixed Indian and *mestizo* population, the *mestizos* will be more helpful than the Indians. In all more accessible and visited places fakes are likely to make their appearance as a trap for the unwary. In some areas, workers in *ladrilleras* (brickyards) can be a fruitful source. And in some provincial towns in the States of Oaxaca, Vera Cruz, Colima and Nayarit, for example, it is usually possible to find private dealers who have pieces for sale.

I have already mentioned Mexico's official attitude towards private collections and the question of important pieces leaving the country. People who want to take away their collections will receive every courtesy and consideration (including facilities for exchange) from the officials at the museum and at the Anthropological Institute whose duty it is to inspect pieces which it is desired to take abroad.

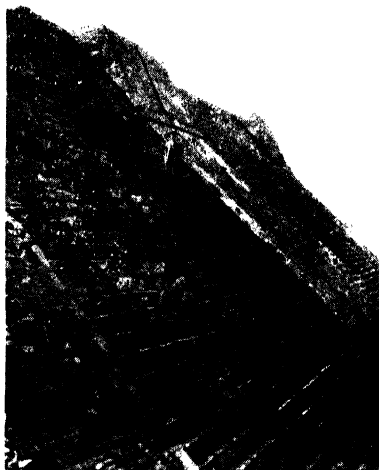


The vast Pyramid of the Sun at San Juan Teotihuacán, State of Mexico. It is 180 feet high.  
(page 80)

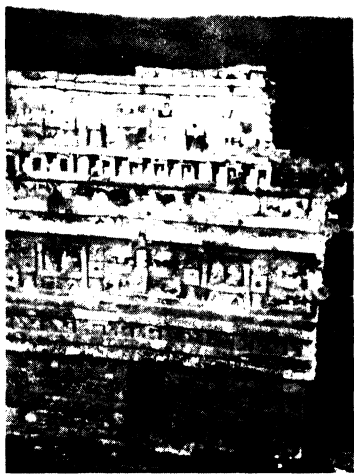
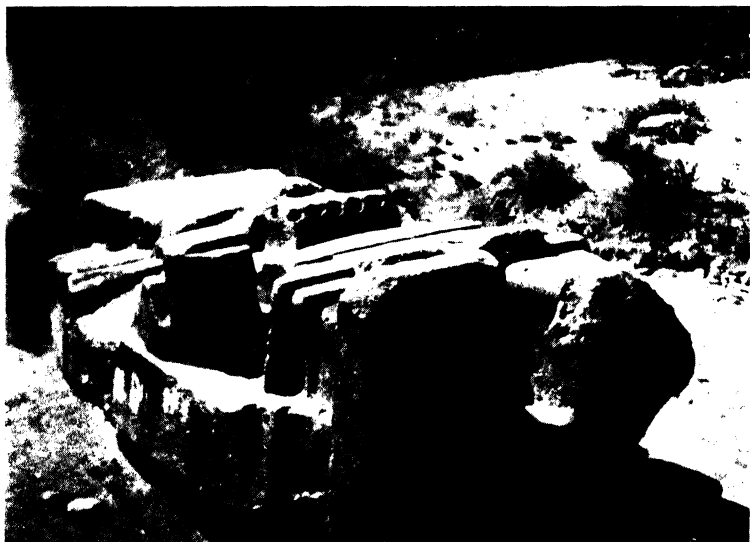
The Xochicalco pyramid (Toltec culture).  
(page 88)



The plumed-serpent *motif* on the Xochicalco pyramid. (page 88)



The main stairway of the Aztec pyramid at Tenayuca, Federal District. (page 87)



*Top.* The grim idol of Coatlinchán. (*page 89*)

*Below (left).* Detail of the date-glyphs on a stela of the "Old Mayan Empire" at Copán, Republic of Honduras. (*page 93*)

*(right).* A building known as "La Iglesia" (the church) at Chichen Itzá, Yucatan, capital of the "New Mayan Empire". (*page 94*)



A typical Maya Indian from the territory of  
Quintana Roo.



Maya village head-men.



*Top (left).* An Otomi Indian.

*(right).* A Chamula (or Tzotzil) Indian from the State of Chiapas.

*Below (left)* Mexicanas (women of the tribe descended from the

*(right).* An old man of the Tarascan tribe, Michoacán.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE INDIANS—1945

THE stories of Messrs. Ballantyne and Fenimore Cooper have served to leave with most of us a visual picture of the North American Indian as someone rather red and naked, befeathered, wild, and ferocious. Yet Mexico is North America, and the Indian from Mexico has little in common with this mental picture.

Most of the Indians at the time of the scenes of these stories were nomadic hunters; there are very few Indians in Mexico to-day that can be called hunters, and only the very small and primitive Seri and Lacandón groups are nomadic. Probably the only tribe now in existence in Mexico which bears much outward resemblance to the North American "Redskin" is the peaceful Tarahumara tribe, living in the mountains of Chihuahua, though there are others, also in the north-west of the country, who are ethnically akin to their now not very numerous neighbours in the south-west of the United States, such as the Pueblos, the Apaches, the Navajos and the Yumas.

The Mexican Indian of to-day is usually a good deal less spectacular in appearance than his relative in the north, as usually portrayed. The colour of his skin is not much of a criterion, for the Mexican of mixed blood is frequently just as dark as the Indian. His clothes, his language, and his physiognomy usually offer the most obvious points of recognition. In some cases the hair of the Indian will reveal his race, as it is liable to grow inordinately low on the forehead; it is usually black and straight, and, in the case of the men, lustreless. Facial hair is usually lacking or is, at most, a few sparse straight hairs. The casual traveller in Mexico City who imagines that he is surrounded by Indians, is as likely as not to be wrong, for they are normally not present in the capital in great numbers, though they may come in for *fiestas* of one sort or another.

The visitor who goes to Mexico by car, and who remains on

the good National Highways, is likely to see only six races of Indians in any numbers—the Otomis, mostly in the State of Hidalgo, the Mexicas (popularly referred to as Mexicanos, or Aztecs) in various parts of the south centre of the country, the Mixtecs and Zapotecs in Oaxaca, the Tarascans in Michoacán, and possibly the Totonacs in Puebla and Vera Cruz. All the other races live off the main roads, or in areas that are not linked up with the main system of the Carreteras Nacionales. The traveller by rail may well pass through the habitats of other races, but railway travel is not, as a rule, conducive to detailed observation or study.

We are told that the indigenous population of Mexico at the time of the Conquest was very considerable indeed, and a figure of 30,000,000 for the Aztec Empire alone is mentioned by Humboldt. But from the early sixteenth century onwards the progress of wholesale *mestizaje* naturally resulted throughout the years in a large-scale reduction of the numbers of people who could be regarded as Indians. In 1810, Don Francisco Navarro y Noriega wrote that of a total population of 6,114,915 there were 3,678,281 Indians. Whilst it is unlikely that these figures were completely accurate, they presumably serve as an indication of the trends of the preceding three centuries, during which Colonial legislation appears to have regarded the indigenous population solely as something to exploit. The Government statistics for the year 1900 show that at that time only 1,794,293 Mexicans over the age of five spoke Indian languages. By 1921 this figure was 1,868,892, by 1930, 2,251,086, and by 1940, 2,945,085.

It appears, then, that in spite of the continuing effects of *mestizaje* on their numbers, the Indians themselves are now on the increase. The reason for this is probably the more benevolent official attitude towards the Indians which has come into being in recent years.

The Mexican Revolution, which came about in an effort to improve the lot of the oppressed classes, whether Indian or *mestizo*, has indeed resulted in benefits to the Indian populace. Many Indians have received land under the Agrarian Reform, and public welfare and rural education have jointly had the effect of reducing disease and infant mortality in many of the groups.

Nevertheless in some of the remoter areas Indian infant mortality is still extremely high. Onchocercosis (hereditary blindness) and *mal de pinto* (a skin discoloration) are also scourges which it has not yet been possible effectively to combat. In certain remote regions the prevalence of these diseases is a local tragedy. One such district is the little-known Chinantec area on the borders of Oaxaca and Vera Cruz. Bernard Bevan has reported on the health of the Chinantec Indians in some detail in his monograph *The Chinantec*, published in 1938.

The latest published statistics of the Indian populace—those of the 1930 census—recognise fifty-four native languages as still being spoken, but omit three, the existence of which appears to be doubtful. The identification of language with race or tribe, however, is not quite 100 per cent, and the picture is further complicated by the fact that many of the “languages” are so little known that it is not even certain whether they are indeed languages, or merely dialects of another idiom.

The 1930 figures, the purpose of which was to differentiate between the bilinguals and monolinguals of each group, are in synthesis, as follows:

Tribe	Strength	Monolinguals	Bilinguals
1. Cucapas	14	—	14
2. Kilihuis	80	17	63
3. Huaipais	31	—	31
4. Seris <sup>1</sup>	160	64	96
5. Papagos	535	222	313
6. Opatas	40	13	27
7. Pimas	860	8	852
8. Yaquis	7,183	2,134	5,049
9. Mayos	26,815	6,100	20,715
10. Ocoronis	85	77	8
11. Tarahumaras	26,834	14,108	12,726
12. Guarigias	1,120	150	970
13. Tepehuanes	4,738	1,081	3,657
14. Cocas	2,365	900	1,465

<sup>1</sup> — Now more.



	Tribe	Strength	Monolinguals	Bilinguals
15.	Huicholes	3,716	1,888	1,828
16.	Tepecanos	99	41	58
17.	Mexicanos <sup>2</sup>	670,595	356,235	314,360
18.	Cuitlatecs <sup>3</sup>	118	62	56
19.	Chontales de Oaxaca	8,496	1,439	7,057
20.	Tarascos	44,371	15,243	29,128
21.	Kikapoos	495	366	129
22.	Chichimeca-Jonacas	451	—	451
23.	Otomis	218,811	94,693	124,118
24.	Masahuas	77,715	29,269	48,446
25.	Chichimeca-Pames	2,765	1,299	1,466
26.	Matlatzincas	1,167	151	1,016
27.	Mixtecs	172,114	111,391	60,723
28.	Zapotecs	216,825	111,660	105,165
29.	Amuzgos	8,247	5,779	2,468
30.	Triques	2,741	2,148	593
31.	Chatinos	11,739	8,208	3,531
32.	Mazatecs	55,343	45,253	10,090
33.	Cuicatecs	9,221	5,744	3,477
34.	Chinantecs	24,073	17,190	6,883
35.	Ojitecs	172	102	70
36.	Ixcatecs	656	4	652
37.	Totonacs	90,425	58,561	31,864
38.	Tepehuas	3,786	2,272	1,514
39.	Zoques	20,969	9,228	11,741
40.	Mixes	31,698	24,023	7,675
41.	Yavanas	91	78	13
42.	Tlapanecs	16,479	13,287	3,192
43.	Chochos	2,308	372	1,936
44.	Popolocas	20,927	3,813	17,114
45.	Huaves	4,135	2,363	1,772
46.	Huastecs	41,271	21,003	20,268
47.	Chontales de Tabasco	15,610	3,352	12,258
48.	Mayas	279,093	131,836	147,257
49.	Choles	16,903	15,125	1,778

<sup>2</sup> = "Aztecs."<sup>3</sup> = Now less.

	Tribes	Strength	Monolinguals	Bilinguals	
50.	} Chamulas {	Tzotziles	34,253	26,231	8,022
51.		Tzendales	40,342	32,363	7,979
52.	Tojolabales	8,471	4,777	3,694	
53.	Mames	21,685	3,420	18,265	
54.	Lacandones	200	—	—	

Total 2,228,757.

Mendizabal and Jimenez Moreno, the authorities on the philology of North and Middle America, after exhaustive research lasting many years, expressed the view in 1939 that 125 separate languages existed some time before the Conquest in the territory that is now the Republic of Mexico.

In 1888 the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística published a small work entitled: *Colección Polidíomica Mexicana*, containing versions of the Lord's Prayer in no less than sixty-eight Mexican native languages. These had apparently been collected from a variety of sources around 1860, or possibly earlier. The classification by no means agrees with that of the 1930 statistics, and, in fact, only twenty-eight languages are common to both lists. The high total of the 1888 list was reached by subdividing such languages as Otomi, Huastec and Tarahumara into various distinct forms, and the visual differences between their texts would indeed seem to warrant their being considered languages and not dialects. However, of the sixty-eight tongues listed, at least fifteen, all attributed to the north-west of Mexico, have evidently become completely extinct in the meantime. Twenty-five of the languages now recognised are absent from this earlier list, and as most of these are spoken by relatively small and remote groups, it is probable that they had not been discovered or studied before 1860. So small are some of the groups now recognised, that it seems inevitable that their languages will soon cease to be spoken at all, and perhaps the next fifty years will see a reduction from the present total of fifty-four tongues to around forty.

The 1930 table shows that nowadays only five ethnic groups total more than 100,000 souls—the Mexicas, the Mayas, the Otomis, the Zapotecs and the Mixtecs, in that order. Whilst all these, except the Otomis, have a great and cultured past,

other races with a comparable background, such as the Totonacs and Tarascans, are to-day very depleted in numbers. It is not surprising then that such great and advanced peoples as the Teotihuacán and Colima cultures and the Toltecs had entirely disappeared, before the first Spaniards arrived.

A profound knowledge of pre-Conquest and post-Conquest trends would be necessary to explain adequately the reasons for the "degeneration" of those Indian races which, in their heyday, reached a high standard of culture, and I prefer to attempt no explanation of their cultural fall from these heights of achievement, to their present humble and uninspiring mode of life.<sup>1</sup> It must just be accepted that the Mayas no longer know how to erect such remarkable buildings as their forefathers built, and that they no longer have the ability or the interest to make scientific time-computations, or to practise astronomy or herbalism. We must just accept the fact that the Mixtec of to-day can no longer work jade or gold, in which crafts his race excelled many centuries ago.

In some areas the Indians still adhere to their traditional and superstitious beliefs, but in a vague, elastic and ignorant manner, and without the deep-rooted and almost fanatical pagan piety which is still prevalent amongst, for example, the Quiché Indians of Guatemala. Many Indian rural communities on the other hand are among the most pious Christian congregations in the country, and the symbolism of the Catholic Church is far from being camouflage for their once traditional pagan deities.

I have mentioned in another chapter that near meridian 21° N. is an abruptly defined line of demarcation, archaeologically and ethnologically speaking. North of this "frontier" the material available for the student of either subject is less abundant than farther south. All the most advanced ancient civilisations settled down south of this line, and although, as has already been mentioned, numerous tribes formerly lived in considerable numbers in the north-west of the country, those that have disappeared have left comparatively little trace.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, see von Humboldt's observation on page 106.

<sup>2</sup> In the Colonial period, the north-west of the country (i.e., Sonora and Chihuahua) was known as *La region de los Indios Bravos* (the region of savage or wild Indians).

The first thirteen groups featured in the table on pages 99-100 are the still living descendants of these people, but only the Mayos and the Tarahumaras still have any numerical strength. Outside this Sonora-Chihuahua region the only Indians whose habitat extends at all to the north of the line of demarcation, are the small group of Kikapoos (who immigrated from U.S. territory in the last century and now live in the State of Coahuila), and the compact Cora and Huichol tribes, mainly in the State of Nayarit.

I have already expressed the view that the extremes of cultural development among the Indians of Mexico are probably represented to-day by the Seris of Sonora, claimed to be the most primitive inhabitants of the North American continent, and the progressive and robust Zapotecs of Oaxaca. The two trips described in Chapter III, were planned with the object of seeing these two extremes in their own habitats. Whilst the Zapotecs, past and present, have been studied in detail, the Seris have been very little observed or described, and recently a good deal more attention has been paid even to the Lacandones of Chiapas, who run the Seris close as regards primitiveness.

The Zapotecs are a fine, intelligent and progressive people, and are the dominant and most numerous race in the State of Oaxaca, which is the home of no fewer than sixteen other smaller tribes. The Zapotecs have a trade hegemony in the area, and have little competition to face in this respect. They are proud of their language, and speak it on such occasions as Congresses on Indigenous Affairs in the capital, without the reluctance most of the other Indians show to speak their own tongues in such circumstances. In fact, in three years' residence in Mexico City, I heard only Zapotec and Maya spoken before general audiences. Notices in Mexicano (Aztec) are occasionally to be seen posted up in the city, when a *fiesta* of some sort is expected to attract peasants from the country around. The Zapotecs seem more race-conscious and more prepared to play their part in public life than the numerically superior Mexicanos, Otomis and Mayas. In the case of the latter, their comparative isolation from the rest of the country, in Yucatán, is doubtless the reason for this, for they are a

vigorous people, with a strong national sense, and many characteristics which contrast sharply with those of all the other peoples of Mexico.

Let us glance at the relatively recent increase in official government attention to the Indians and to the problems they represent.

In the '20's, Don Manuel Gamio, with wisdom and foresight, founded the *Dirección de Antropología*, with various ramifications as a branch of the Ministry of Agriculture. His idea was not to create merely a faculty of anthropological studies, but something more comprehensive and operative, including an organisation dedicated to bettering the lot of the Indians and to helping them to adapt themselves to modern life. This activity was vested in a branch called the *Departamento de Población Contemporánea*, and the scope of its activities was decided by the results of the theoretical research carried on by the anthropologists of the Directorate.

This government office directed its first efforts towards the Valley of Teotihuacán, which is populated by Mexicanos, and which is the site of the impressive archæological remains already mentioned. Various industries and handicrafts were initially taught to the Indians of Teotihuacán, and many other similar steps have since been taken to assist other indigenous communities.

A few years later, the then President, General Lázaro Cárdenas, a man who from his earliest days has had the welfare of the Indians very much at heart, created the *Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas* as an independent Government department with a somewhat wider scope. The fundamental objects of the department are, according to its charter: (1) the study of the economic and social conditions of the indigenous races, with the immediate practical object of taking measures, based on reality, to bring about their improvement, and the making of precise recommendations to the Government as to the activities and constructions it should undertake in each region to contribute to this end; (2) the care and protection of the Indians' rights *vis-à-vis* federal and local authorities in all matters of collective interest.

There are indications that the department is making

headway in this difficult and very necessary crusade. Limited funds, however, have so far made impossible any sensational results, and progress where some of the remoter tribes are concerned is particularly hindered by rudimentary communications.

The attitude of those idealists who are seriously endeavouring to ameliorate the lot of the Indians is typified by an address made publicly in Mexico City by Don Lucio Mendieta y Núñez, one of the associates of Señor Gamio, in June 1937, on the occasion of the inauguration of an exhibition to mark General Cárdenas's "six year plan". Don Lucio's words are doubtless more forceful than those that would have been employed by many men in high places, but they are undoubtedly most significant and highly just.

He said on this occasion: "In the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the Mexican populace lies undoubtedly the fundamental problem of our country. The origins of all our past and present social evils, and of the most serious dangers which threaten the future development of our land lie in the differences of race and culture of the Mexican people. . . .

"Between the ethnic constituents of our people there is no fundamental co-ordination, with the result that the problem to be solved is nothing less than that of the integration of Mexican nationality. For it cannot be truly said that Mexico is a nation, whilst, within its structure, large indigenous groups still exist which have no spiritual bonds whatever with the rest of the country's populace. . . .

"No one ever dared to suggest the destruction of the Indians, as was undertaken in the United States of America. . . . One recalls that when that venerable Spanish scholar, Don Gregorio López, was asked, some time after the Conquest, what he suggested should be done with the Indians, he merely replied: 'Leave them alone.' And this is exactly what the independent Governments of Mexico have done; they have left the Indians to vegetate in their miserable existence, and have permitted them to be iniquitously exploited as soon as they come within reach of the *criollos* and the *mestizos*. The policy that has been followed with the Mexican Indians is more criminal than the destructive action taken against the Indians

of the United States, for the latter were decimated rapidly, whilst the former were condemned to a slow and painful death. . . .

"Nowadays the life of the Indian is a source of inspiration, and, to a great extent, of artistic, musical and dramatic creativeness. In spite of the high opinions the intellectuals have of their own culture, it is the Indian who gives Mexico its personality, both within the country and outside. Mexico without the Indian would have no defined personality or individual physiognomy, because the *criollo* and the *mestizo*, whose culture is European, are only imitators of European or North American life. It is necessary to go to the Indian in order to discover our own roots, to identify the creative expression of the Mexican people. Beyond the country's frontiers, Mexico attracts the interest of scholars, artists, and indeed of most foreigners, because of its archæological remains, and because of its 'typical' present—that is to say, because of its Indians. Inside the country only the anonymous music of the *campo*, the folk melodies, and those composed by *criollos* and *mestizos* who have drawn their inspiration from them, only the theatre and cinema which reproduce the ethnic features of Mexico, only that painting which shows the rural population and all its manifestations, have any authentic value which we can really call our own.

"The Indians are much to be admired. Vanquished in the Conquest, reduced in numbers, despoiled and oppressed during the Colonial period and during more than a hundred years of independence, they still have enough vitality and creative force to stamp their personality and particular qualities on a modern state. . . .

"In order adequately to assess the value of these indigenous races, one must refer to the justifiable observation of Baron von Humboldt, who said, in this respect: 'In every human group there exists an élite which is its highest expression. Until now this élite has invariably been the element that has led human society. The indigenous races [of Mexico] were deprived of their representative men, of their best talents, and of those capable of organising and leading them, because these people perished in the Conquest. What has remained of the native

racess is merely the plebs, the mass that follows, and not the men who lead and guide.' . . .

"Since 1910 the Revolution has been trying to revindicate the Indians, and this formidable task has been undertaken with the help of two main instruments—firstly, the equitable redistribution of land [i.e., the agrarian reforms], and secondly, the rural school. . . .

"If the Indians constituted a homogeneous group it would be relatively easy to establish close relations, and a harmonious understanding, and even to bring about their racial fusion with the whites and the *mestizos* with their European culture; but the problem is more complex, because the native races are dissimilar, not only ethnically, but in their standard of development, in their agricultural potentialities, and in their ability to better themselves economically and culturally. The geographical contrasts of the areas they inhabit contribute to making the Indian problem an extraordinarily complicated one, and all simple or unilateral methods adopted for its solution are condemned to failure."

I have cited Señor Mendieta y Núñez at some length, as these quotations reveal the whole crux of the problem with concise eloquence, and the fact that their author is a well-informed Mexican renders the statements all the more convincing.

Indian mythology<sup>1</sup> offers a rich field for those who are interested in this aspect of the native races, and particularly for anyone who is able to devote himself to learning their languages. And there is undoubtedly a great deal of research yet to be done in this respect.

As with the classical cultures of the old world, the mythology of the more advanced civilisations is closely linked up with their archæology, because most of the vestiges we are able to study were inspired by religion, which was itself based on mythology. No one without some knowledge of Aztec mythology, for example, can hope to make intelligent deductions from, or adequate interpretations of, Aztec archæo-

<sup>1</sup> See two works from Anglo-Saxon authors: L. Spence: *Myths of Mexico and Peru*, and Donald Mackenzie: *Myths of Pre-Columbian America*; and from one American authoress: Marian Storm: *Tales from Tarascan Places*.



logical finds, and infinitely more has been found out of Aztec and Mayan mythology through archæological studies, than by folklorists.

At the other end of the scale are the primitive Seris whose general degeneration has ensured that their mythology, whatever it may have once been, is nowadays only fragmentary. These people, whose predecessors have left next to no vestiges of their passing, cannot in consequence be studied from this angle at all, except through interrogations. The number of people capable of interrogating a Seri in his own tongue is so small, that little has been elucidated, and as the years pass the possibilities of collecting any further facts dwindle.

But the peoples with a great background, who formerly had an elaborate pantheon of gods, and whose mental capacities remain sufficiently unimpaired for their picturesque legends to be passed down verbally from generation to generation, without loss of detail, certainly still have much new material of this nature to impart.

A few individuals are still obtaining these stories. Some of the stories, apart from their general appeal and entertainment value, may well throw some light on factual history, and fill gaps in the reconstruction of pre-Conquest events.

One amateur, who has been doing this interesting work is Dr. Narciso Souza-Novelo of Mérida, Yucatán. This gentleman speaks the Mayan tongue, and has spent many years collecting facts and legends from the Mayas. One of his latest story-reconstructions, published recently in Spanish for the first time, purports to explain the origin of a building generally known as "La Vieja", in the ruined Mayan city of Uxmal. The story with its picturesque detail is perhaps of sufficient interest to be accounted here. It is highly *simpático* and imaginative, and is a good example of the type of story that may be unearthed from a search for old legends. The atmosphere of the European scene is entirely absent, for these stories are the very quintessence of the early American background. Dr. Sousa-Novelo has very kindly granted permission for this translation of his version to be published. He has entitled it: *X-pulyaah*, which is the Mayan word for "witch". The scene is set in the New Mayan Empire—after the migration from the south.

*X-pulyaah*

It is said that at the time of the greatest splendour of the Mayan race at Yukalpeten<sup>1</sup> there existed, about five leagues from Uxmal, a town known as K'Abah. This name is believed to derive from an enormous stone statue that stood in the main square, where there were also four *Ya'Ax-Che'* trees<sup>2</sup>, which represented the four *Batabes*<sup>3</sup> who support on their shoulders the columns that hold up the world, one at each of the cardinal points: *Sak Ah Bakab* (the white one, to the north), *Kan Ah Bakab* (the yellow one, to the south), *Chak Ah Bakab* (the red one, to the east), and *Ek' Ah Bakab* (the black one, to the west).

The statue was of a man, perhaps of a hero, holding an enormous domesticated serpent in his left hand. The name of the town is attributed to this serpent-tamer, although opinions vary as to the exact meaning of the word *K'Abah*. Some say that it derives from *K'Ab* (hand) and *Bah* (to pin down), referring to the method by which these serpents were caught, in order to be tamed; others maintain that the origin of the name is *K'Ab* (hand) and *Ah* (he), which together form *Ah K'Ab*, also in reference to the serpent-tamer, and that from this the anagram *K'Abah* came to be the name of the town.

In any case, an ancient *X-pulyaah* lived in old K'Abah. She performed miraculous feats which are duly recorded in the pages of our past history, although they must remain in the mysterious field of legend.

Nobody knew the name of this feared inhabitant of the town. Neither did anyone know whence she had come. Everybody knew her only as an old woman, living in a squalid hut made of *sabal*-tree leaves beyond the town limits. She lived alone, and her only companions were the *Sots*<sup>4</sup>, the *Tunkuluchu*<sup>5</sup>, and the *Xoch*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A town in the south of the Yucatán Peninsula.

<sup>2</sup> *Ceibas*.

<sup>3</sup> *Caciques*.

<sup>4</sup> Bats.

<sup>5</sup> Eagle-owls.

<sup>6</sup> Smaller species of owls.

Nevertheless she had celebrated her first *Katun*<sup>1</sup> dancing around a *Haltun*<sup>2</sup>, into the waters of which, by moonlight, she had thrown nine fragrant *X-t'uluhuy* flowers<sup>3</sup> after each dance, and this ceremony had been her initiation into witch-doctory.

But why had she abandoned her place of origin and moved to K'Abah?

The owl, which waits until the night envelops the land of the Mayas in its mantle of jet before sallying forth to the hills and the towns of men, has told all this to the *Winikes*<sup>4</sup>, who have passed the story down from generation to generation until it has reached us.

And this is what the owl told:

The young girl had from her earliest days loved a beautiful and youthful prince of a ruling family, and had often sent him by her handmaidens the loveliest and most fragrant blooms from her garden. The prince, intrigued by these oft-repeated gifts, wished to know what manner of woman was sending them to him, and despatched a messenger to beg for a meeting. The girl, endowed by the gods with ugliness, would only agree to a rendezvous beneath the spreading branches of a *Ya' Ax-Che'* tree on a night when the goddess U<sup>5</sup> was absent, and when in consequence everything was inky black.

Only the *Kokay*<sup>6</sup> could light the way with the intermittent rays of his wonderful little lamp.

The prince arrived at the trysting place, curious and nervous because of the strangeness of the occasion. And he met the young girl swathed in a white robe, and giving out a delicate fragrance. On hearing her sweet voice he felt his heart-beats grow faster, and he delivered himself up to the unknown enchantress. And while the two remained together, the place echoed with the music of their kisses.

Night after night the prince arrived at the trysting place, eagerly awaiting the caresses of this delightful woman, and

<sup>1</sup> Period of twenty years, each of 360 days.

<sup>2</sup> Small depression where rain-water gathers.

<sup>3</sup> The *Plumeria pudica* (Jacq.). Frangipane tree (?).

<sup>4</sup> Men.

<sup>5</sup> The goddess of the moon.

<sup>6</sup> Glow-worm (or fire-fly?)

some time passed in this way. But as the meetings invariably took place on moonless nights, the young man became more than ever curious to know who it was that was giving him such intense pleasure. At first his entreaties to meet her by day were in vain, but after continued insistence on his part, one night she finally gave in, and consented to meet him the following morning.

At dawn, just as the *Sak-pakal*<sup>1</sup> was beginning to sing in the bushes, the prince was already waiting beneath the *Ya'Ax-Che'*, impatient and excited. Soon through the mist appeared the figure of the girl, who threw herself straight into the strong arms of her lover, covered her face, and broke into sobs. The young man gently put his hand beneath her warm chin, and raised her face to his in order to kiss away her tears. And at this moment, as her *rebozo* fell back on to her shoulders, a ray of sunlight shone on her disfigured face, and the prince, horror-stricken, pushed her out of his arms, and returned disillusioned and regretful to the place of his parents.

The girl, her illusions shattered of this, her first and only love, decided to leave for ever the region which had witnessed her ephemeral happiness; she wished to see no more the man who had broken her heart, and as she could never love again, she thought to find solace in witchcraft, to encourage love and hate amongst mortals. She journeyed far, and finally found a tumbledown hut near K'Abah. She took possession of it, isolated from the stir of the inhabitants of the town.

There, in company with the *Sots'*, the *Tunkuluchu* and the *Xoch'*, she lived, devoting herself to the preparation of mysterious philtres, and only going out to fill her vessels with water from the pond called *K'Oom Chan*. And there she gradually withered, as the flowers wither, and became an old woman. And as the winter of life began to approach, she felt very lonely, and yearned for a son who might look after her when she closed her eyes to undertake her last journey.

On one of those gay, fresh and fragrant mornings of the *Mayab*<sup>2</sup>, when the birds fill the air with their mellifluous trillings, the witch went out for water and arrived at the banks

<sup>1</sup> A thrush-like bird.

<sup>2</sup> The country of the Mayas, as it is referred to in the Mayan language.

of her favourite pond. Instead of filling her vessel, she sank down on her knees on the damp earth, raised her arms, and prayed to *Ich-K'In*<sup>1</sup>:

"Oh great god! I know that on the day I was born thou gavest me the life of my heart, the light of my eyes, and purity of spirit. But this my breast has never known love, as the birds who sing amidst the flowers know it. Years ago my sins fell back on me, and made me a bad woman. Now I have grown old and my spirit becomes too weak for me to work. Do not leave me alone in my misery. Grant me a son at this last hour of my life, before the devil takes me to the underworld to atone for my sins."

On ending her prayer she got up, and immediately noticed among the stones at the water's edge a beautiful tortoise's egg<sup>2</sup>, and, inspired by a supernatural force, she carefully picked it up, hid it in her breast, and returned to her dwelling. There she put the egg into a basket filled with down from a *piim* tree<sup>3</sup>.

A male child was born from this egg, and it ceased to grow after a year, although it walked and talked and thought like a man. It was the dwarf, who was later to become the king of Uxmal.

He reached the throne after successfully overcoming the hard tests to which he was subjected, thanks to the protection of his progenitor, the *X-pulyaah*. As soon as he was in a position to do so, the dwarf ordered a palace to be constructed for her, and had her accepted at his court. This is the building which is now known as the *Casa de la Vieja* at Uxmal.

But the witch did not live long to enjoy her new and comfortable position. She died soon after being installed, but she died happy, because she no longer had any worries for her son the dwarf. After her death, the dwarf ordered a statue to be raised in her memory, in recognition of all that she had done for him. This statue was destroyed, but nobody knows when or by whom. The body of it disappeared, and the head was taken away to (what is now) Mérida.

<sup>1</sup> The greatest god of the Mayan pantheon.

<sup>2</sup> More likely a terrapin's.

<sup>3</sup> The *Pochote* (*Ceiba æsculifolia*).

The legend goes on to say that although the old woman was publicly buried, no one really believed that she died. The *X-pulyaah* appeared to die, in order to leave her sumptuous palace without causing sadness or tribulation to her son, and it is believed that in the middle of the night she was removed from the tomb by her friends the wizards, and was transported to that part of the underworld where, they say, the sacred well of *Mani* joins that of *T-Wo'*, above which the city of Mérida now stands. In the immense underworld she sits eternally at the edge of a pool of water, and exchanges gourds of precious elixirs for young girls, which are fed to the gigantic *Och Kan*<sup>(1)</sup> which is her eternal companion.

<sup>1</sup> Boa constrictor.

## CHAPTER SIX

### NATURAL HISTORY INTERLUDE

THE dear old lady who writes from some rural or suburban spot of our own green and pleasant land to *The Times* or the *Observer*, to the effect that she saw her first chiff-chaff on March 17th (and isn't this a record?), or that the same pair of house-martins have been nesting in exactly the same spot on her property for six years (and are any similar cases known?) has no counterpart in Mexico. It may well be that she is without a parallel in any country in the world, with the possible exception of Germany, where they are also keen on such things.

Englishmen who are interested in nature (and there are more of them than one might at first think) have a feast in store for them in Mexico. This is not only because of the contrast between wild things in their own country and those of another continent and latitude, but also because of Mexico's own strong climatic and topographical contrasts. Mexico, with its extremes of altitude and latitude, has everything from a tropical flora and fauna to a form of life which is her own equivalent of the palæarctic, to be found naturally on the higher slopes of her highest mountains.

The nature-loving Englishman should not imagine that he can just go into a bookshop in Mexico City and come out again with a concise handbook on, for example, Mexican birds, which will enable him within a short time to recognise any species he may see in the field. It is not so simple.

The Republic has produced remarkably few handbooks on natural science, either scientific or popular. I can recall only two recent works on the subject, and both are devoted to botany. These are: *Catálogo de Plantas Mexicanas*, by Maximo Martinez (1937), and *Las Cactaceas de Mexico*, by Helia Bravo, of the National Institute of Biology (also published in 1937).

The latter is an excellent work, richly illustrated, concise and scientific without being exaggeratedly technical. Seeing

that Mexico is the natural habitat of the cactus, it is fitting that there should be a Mexican handbook of the numerous local forms of this curious and, to some, fascinating, group of plants. This book is the last word on the subject, and as it is written from the "national" angle, one does not have to wade laboriously through text on, for example, South African or United States species.

But on other natural history subjects almost the only books are the standard reference works by American zoologists, ornithologists, or whatever it may be. The research carried out in this field by scientists from American institutes and universities is excellent, but it is inconvenient to find that in their works Mexico is either included as "part of North America" or "part of the Caribbean Zoogeographical region", or something similar. Moreover, these works, being in English and generally bulky, are neither digestible nor interesting for most Mexicans, who consequently know little about their plants, animals or insects. Thus, the keen naturalist in Mexico, lacking smaller books, is obliged to be more observant than he would be at home, and to rely more on himself for his nature lore.

And yet the basis was laid at an early date for the propagation throughout the country of a very adequate knowledge of these matters. The Mayas of Yucatán, at the height of their glory, are known to have been just as advanced in natural history as they were in various other sciences. In view of the rarity of Mayan codices or other manuscripts, it must be assumed that the lore accumulated was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Even to-day the Mayan names for wild things used in Yucatán are extraordinarily precise, and are based on a fairly scientific scheme of classification. To quote one example, the Maya is not confused by superficial appearances in spiders, and knows full well that a certain small spider is more akin to a larger species than it is to another small one which it closely resembles. And he gives them names in his own language that make this differentiation clear. Such perspicacity is, as far as I know, absent in any other part of Mexico.

The ancient Aztecs' knowledge of botany was profound,



mainly due to the importance attached by them to herbalism. In 1552 a converted Indian named Martinus de la Cruz wrote a remarkable work, now known as the Badianus Codex, which describes about 330 plants, giving their native names (written for the first time in our alphabet) and full particulars of their traditional medicinal uses, besides containing illustrations in colour of eighty-two of them. The original Aztec text was translated into Latin by a second Indian called Badianus, from which the manuscript derives its name.

The imperial garden at Huaxtepec, in what is now the State of Morelos, was the chief botanical centre under the later Aztec emperors, and after the Conquest it continued as the main seat of botanical learning in the country. The Spanish botanist Francisco Hernández spent much time there as well as at the lesser gardens. Fray Francisco Ximénez published in 1615 a monumental work, largely from the manuscripts of Hernández, entitled: *Naturaleza y Virtudes Medicinales de las Plantas y las Animales de la Nueva España*.

But research waned. In the nineteenth century there was a period when Mexican medicinal herbs became somewhat famous in Europe, but to-day, although many Indians attach great importance to the use of their traditional remedies, they probably know more about the subject than anyone else. One cannot say that botany now attracts many more enthusiasts than does any other branch of natural history.

In Mexico City, in the Calle del Chopo, there is a Natural History Museum of considerable merit, which contains a representative collection of the country's fauna. The building, however, is unworthy of its contents, and lack of funds has prohibited the more adequate housing of the collection. The technical eye tends to criticise the labelling, which is in some cases out of date, making research somewhat difficult.

Another, smaller, natural history collection is housed in a circular pavilion in the gardens of the Botanical Institute in the Bosque de Chapultepec. The presentation here is better, and the public attendance, particularly on Sundays (when all the world and his wife converge on the Bosque), well justifies the care taken with this collection.

A little farther out of town, on the edges of the lake of the

Bosque de Chapultepec, is the *Casa del Lago*, which houses the *Instituto Nacional de Biología*. Scientific research is carried on here, there is a fine library on biology in general, and the Institute gives a warm welcome to anyone in search of information. Still farther to the west are the spacious Zoological Gardens, beautifully located among pine trees. The collection of animals and birds is fair, but the labelling is not inspiring.

In those cases where there is room for criticism, lack of funds has been, and is, the main handicap to excellence, but the Ministry of Education doubtless has many more important claims on its budget.

When the Spaniards arrived, they found that Mexico was without any beasts of burden. The principle of the wheel was also unknown, and the Indians carried everything on their backs. Horses, asses, cattle, pigs and goats were importations from Europe, and the largest animal that existed in Mexico when Cortés landed must have been the American tapir. This animal, known in Mexico as the *danta*, is found in the forests of the south, though, being very shy, it is not likely to be seen by the average person.

It is still Mexico's bulkiest wild animal, though a heavy-weight antelope, called *borrendo*, which lives in the deserts of Baja California and Sonora, is a good second. The next largest mammals are probably the *borrego silvestre* or wild goat (also from Baja California) and the local varieties of deer. The deer of Mexico and Central America, an animal somewhat like the European roe deer, is either the Virginian deer of the United States, or something akin to it. The number of distinct species is uncertain. There are probably at least three.

Then come the great cats, starting with the jaguar (called *tigre* in Mexico), and the puma, known as *león*. Of the remaining mammals, those most commonly met with are the *coyote* (one of the Mexican names with universal acceptance), the ocelot (*tigrillo*, or *gato de monte*), the coatimondi (known in Mexico as *pisote*), the kinkajou (called *micoleón*, *mico de noche*, or *martica* by Mexicans, and "honey-bear" by the Americans), the racoon (*mapache*), the paca (*tepesquintle*), the agouti (*guatusa*), the nine-banded armadillo, and various sorts of opossums (*tlacuaztín*).

The *tepesquintle*, the *guatusa* and the armadillo are much prized as food by the country people, and I can confirm from experience that the first two are excellent.

The area has the usual complement of small rodents; I believe that Mr. Ivan Sanderson, sent by the British Museum to little-known Western Mexico in the early thirties, succeeded in establishing the existence of, and describing for the first time, some twenty-three new species of rats and mice.

The number of native bats can only be a matter for conjecture. In 1904 T. G. Elliott of the Field Columbian Museum, Chicago, schematically described 138 kinds from "Middle America and the West Indies". Some of these are not Mexican, and it is probable that there are many species found in the country that have not yet been described.

The same author attributes only two sorts of monkeys to Mexico. Both are found in the south-eastern part of the country—the Mexican howler (*Alouatta mexicana*) and the Mexican spider-monkey (*Ateles vellerosus*).

Two native dogs are among Mexico's zoological curiosities, and in Europe most people have heard about them, though they are probably not familiar with them. These are the "Mexican Hairless" and the "Chihuahua". I shall mention them later on.

It is not unlikely that the forebears of most of the performing sea-lions that the reader may have seen in circuses came from Mexican waters. The home of this fascinating animal is the west coast of North America as far south as the Galapagos Islands. The most numerous colonies in former times were on both sides of the Peninsula of Baja California. Inside the Gulf their numbers are now very depleted, but there are still flourishing colonies at various isolated points off the Pacific Coast of the Peninsula.

One of Mexico's most remarkable creatures is the unique *axolotl*. The Aztecs gave this name to the larval form of a species of salamander—*Amblystoma tigrinum*—and used to eat it. In certain circumstances the larval form remains permanent, and no mature salamander develops. This happens in certain waters near Mexico City, such as "Lake" Xochimilco—and possibly also in Lake Texcoco. In other parts of the country

this arrested metamorphosis does not apply at all, and the adult amphibian is found.

Mexico's bird-life is rich and varied, not only because of the climatic contrasts, but also because the country's roughly funnel-shaped outline ensures that the southern extremities, particularly, become a junction for migrants from one end of the continent to the other. In general terms, the resident birds of the uplands of Chiapas are different from those of the centre of the country, and form the western limit of the avifauna of the Central American region.

Except up on the high plateau, where it is rarely, if ever, seen, one of the most familiar Mexican birds is the *zopilote*. This form of the Aztec word *tsopilotl* has been generally adopted in Mexico and Central America, and although it is a vulture no one would dream of calling it *buitre*, the Castilian word for vulture. The *zopilote* is of considerable use to man; anything dying is immediately cleaned to the bone before it has time to befoul the atmosphere. Down in the hot lands it is the government's most effective ally in prophylactic measures, although the bird itself is of somewhat revolting appearance, and is said to be covered with vermin. English-speaking people for some reason invariably call *zopilotes* buzzards, and at the risk of being accused of pedantry, may I say that the *zopilote* has nothing whatever in common with the buzzard of Europe. It is, in fact, one of two species of vultures, either the black vulture or *urubu* (*Catharista urubu* of Vieillot) or the turkey-vulture, (*Cathartes aura* of Linnæus). The former is completely black, and about the size of a domestic fowl. It has a naked head, and is very gregarious; the latter is larger, has longer wings with some white below, and a naked red head, and unless it is actually feeding it is usually seen alone or in pairs. Both species mingle at the feast that ensues when a horse or a steer dies. They are distributed right through Central America, and are protected in most countries. Neither has ever been known to attack anything alive. The black vulture, particularly, is extremely tame, and is accustomed to live in close proximity with man.

Mexico's smallest birds are the humming-birds, of which there are numerous species. The general idea that they are

denizens only of the tropical jungle is disproved in Mexico. Indeed they are found even at an altitude of 10,000 feet. The first week I was in the country I was surprised to meet a pair of them feeding on the flowers of a succulent plant at the top of a small mountain in the *sierra* to the west of the Valley of Mexico, where the night temperature is often extremely low. In general, however, Mexico's high forests seem sad and empty, for their bird-life is very limited, and a dead and forbidding silence reigns in them.

One of the best-known things that Mexico has given the world is the turkey. The etymology of this bird's English name is explained by the fact that it was at first confused with the guinea-fowl, which happened to reach England originally from Turkey. The turkey's French name *dinde*, and its Slavonic versions, such as *indic* and *induk* are at least logical, for the bird may be said to have its origin in the Indies. In Mexico, it is known either as *pavo*—as in Spain—or as *guajolote* (from the Aztec *huexolotl*). This word is as fine an example of onomatopœia as one could wish to hear, though it seems that this is more by chance than by design.

The *guajolote* is one of the most familiar sights in the country, and its flesh is by no means the scarce and rather expensive delicacy most of us consider it in Europe. But the turkey no longer exists in the wild state. There is, however, a *pavo de monte* or wild turkey, which is much sought after by sportsmen, and which is also excellent to eat. It is only a distant relative of the domesticated bird, and is known to British ornithologists as a "curassow", or possibly a "guan", belonging to the scientific genus of *Crax*. They are large handsome birds of predominantly black plumage, with a powerful beak, a closely curled crest, and no trace of the bizarre facial characteristics of the ordinary turkey.

The parrot tribe has for some reason always intrigued me. It is difficult to say why, for the parrot's talking propensities and the endless borderline anecdotes based on them do not appeal to me particularly. There is something unbirdlike and old-mannish about a parrot, whether it talks or not. Indeed, unfledged or half-fledged parrot chicks, a rarity in England, strike me as being even more old-mannish and

ludicrous than the adult birds. I took more than a usual interest in parrots, both in Mexico and Central America. After talking to all sorts and conditions of people in many different places, consulting such literature as there is on this obscure subject, and overcoming the difficulties presented by the almost universal use of such words as *loro*, *cotorra*, and *perico* for any bird remotely resembling a parrot, I came to the conclusions that twenty-one species of the parrot tribe live in Mexico and that about eight of them are found in no other country. They vary in size from the two large species of macaws to a minute parakeet which has no English or Spanish name, as far as I can ascertain, and which lives only on the Islas de Tres Marías out in the Pacific, where the Government penal settlement is located.

I am not a competent person to write of entomology, so I will say only that the Pátzcuaro region of Michoacán and the Córdoba district of Vera Cruz are reputed to be the richest places in Mexico for butterflies, and that the best collection of butterflies and moths that I know in Mexico is that of Mr. Constantine Rickards, who was for many years British Vice-Consul in Oaxaca. His collection is predominantly of the lepidoptera of that State.

Anyone who goes into the country will sooner or later hear the word *alacrán*. The *alacrán* is any one of the numerous species of scorpions which abound in Mexico, particularly in the lower parts of the country. Mexico's scorpions seem to be of variable venomousness, and public opinion—not always very accurate on these matters—holds that those in the States of Durango and Colima are more poisonous than the rest. Scorpions are rarely seen up on the central plateau.

Mexico contains many an *escorpión*, but this word, curiously enough, is used to denote a species of small lizard, which the country folk are firmly convinced is as poisonous as the worst *alacran*. This, I believe, is a popular fallacy, for science does not accept the existence of any poisonous lizards in the world except the large repugnant Gila Monster which lives in the south-west of the United States, and an allied form—*Heloderma horridum*—found in the extreme north of Mexico, in Sonora and Chihuahua.

In the realm of botany it would be almost out of order to mention any plant before maize, or corn, as it is called in the United States. In pre-Conquest times it played a most important part in most of the Indian religions (the Aztecs had a god and goddess of maize, called Ciuteotl and Chicome-coatl respectively). It is accepted that the discovery that maize is good to eat was responsible for converting the early nomadic peoples into sedentary ones, enabling them to devote themselves for the first time to things other than hunting, and, in the case of the Mayas, to achieve their amazing standards of culture.

When World War II broke out, science was carrying on research with certain species of maize from South-Eastern Asia, in order if possible to determine whether American (which means Mexican) maize was developed from it, or was indigenous to America. The answer may possibly have some bearing on the whole theory of the manner of man's arrival in the American continent. This research was temporarily interrupted by the Japanese, but it is hoped that the answer will be forthcoming within a few years.

In twentieth century Mexico the importance of maize still cannot be overemphasised. Ninety-five per cent of the population regards maize as its staple food, for the maize *tortilla*, or flap-jack, is much more widely eaten than bread. A German called Egon Erwin Kisch has done some interesting research on maize in Mexico, the results of which are published in a series of sketches called *Entdeckungen in Mexiko*.

Next on the list of important plants comes the agave family, of which there are over 170 native Mexican species, according to Professor Aurelio del Río. Most of them are capable of being useful to man in one way or another, but only a few are seriously cultivated. Both to the Mayas and to the Aztecs their local species were of great importance. They relied on them medicinally, for the making of fibre and rope (and therefore for many kinds of utensils), for paper, and, particularly in the case of the Aztecs, for beverages, both fermented and unfermented. They also had other uses.

To-day the Peninsula of Yucatán lives almost entirely from the production and export of *henequen*, better known as *sisal*.

The *henequén* plant is the *Agave fourcroydes* of science; *henequén* is its Mayan name, and *sisal* derives from the small Yucatecan port of that name.

Up in the high centre of the Republic, the cultivation of another species of agave covers a wide area, centring on the region to the north-east of Mexico City. This is the plant whose fermented juice, called *pulque*, is a beverage dear to the inhabitants of the plateau, but hardly drunk at lower altitudes. The liquid extracted from the plant (by means of a sucking-gourd called *acocote*<sup>1</sup>) is also drunk before fermentation, and is then known as *agua miel*.

*Pulque* only intoxicates if taken in large quantities, but it is cheap, and the simple people like to imbibe freely at intervals. It is then that the troubles I referred to in Chapter I are to be expected.

Foreigners usually do not care for the drink, the taste of which it is difficult for me to describe. *Pulque curado*—*pulque* mixed with orange-juice—is a more attractive beverage for most non-Mexicans.

Captain G. F. Lyon, R.N., wrote in 1828 that *pulque* tastes almost exactly like the *lachbi* of North Africa, which is the inspissated juice of the date-palm. The only other even semi-serious attempt to describe *pulque* that I have been able to find is one by Karl May, a German counterpart of Mr. Fenimore Cooper. What Herr May's personal experience of the drink was I am unable to say, but a translation of his description is: "a mixture of alum, liquorice, bitter aloes, copper sulphate, salammoniac, elder-berries and soapy water". Perhaps we had better leave it at that!

From this *maguey* plant come also the *gusanos de maguey* which many Mexicans find delicious. I fear that I do not. They are the large fat larvæ of an insect which lays its eggs in the plant, and are eaten fried, usually rolled up in a *tortilla* or a lettuce-leaf.

The agaves which produce the strong drinks of Mexico—*tequila* and *mescal*—are different again, though in general appearance they resemble the *henequén* plant. *Tequila* is made in the west of the country, from Sinaloa to Jalisco, and

<sup>1</sup> The operator of the gourd being called a *tlachiquero*.



particularly around the town in the latter state from which the drink takes its name. *Mescal* comes mainly from Oaxaca, from a similar plant. The two beverages are alike, though *mescal* is esteemed more and is of a darker shade of amber. Both are comparable with vodka, schnapps or country-brewed calvados, and they are probably second only to calvados in strength and intoxicating properties.

Mexico's cacti were mentioned previously in this chapter. America is the original home of the cactus, and all species now found outside America are said to have been brought from the New World. Mexico has more native species than any other country on the continent, so the cactus enthusiast can learn more about them there than elsewhere. Their variation of size, form and habits offers considerable interest, apart from their æsthetic or ornamental merits or demerits. The weird ungraceful growths lend an almost unearthly appearance to some Mexican countrysides, and I cannot think of any grimmer scenery on earth than that of the Mesquital (a barren region in the State of Hidalgo, north of Mexico City) or of certain parts of the Peninsula of Baja California, both of which areas are particularly remarkable for their cacti.<sup>1</sup>

One aspect of natural history in Latin America is the confusion caused by local names.

In England the green woodpecker is credited with about twenty different local English names, and many other forms of life, particularly plants, receive similar treatment. One is therefore hardly surprised to find that nomenclature of birds and animals is also very varied in Latin America, where communities are often relatively isolated, and local Indian names frequently adopted.

This is particularly the case in Central America, where six small countries occupy a limited area, and frontiers are close together. But it also applies to Mexico, where a multiplicity of names may be used, according to region, for the same creature.

Thus, while, for example, the collared peccary is generally known as *pecari* (or, more vaguely, as *jabali*) in Mexico, it is

<sup>1</sup> The exhibition of cacti at Kew, arranged in a realistic Mexican setting, should be of great interest to cactus enthusiasts.

called only *coche de monte* not far away in Guatemala, and *saino* a little farther south in Costa Rica.

The confusion really begins, however, when the reverse applies, that is to say, when the same name is used in two neighbouring countries or areas for two entirely different species. This is by no means unusual.

To cite an instance, the animal known in English as the Virginian fox is called *zorra* in most parts of Mexico. In Yucatán, however, it is known as *gato montes*—a term usually applied to the ocelot, or another small member of the cat tribe. In Costa Rica, this same fox is called *tigrillo*—another name which usually refers to a feline rather than a vulpine animal.

The name *mico de noche* in most places means the kinkajou, but in Yucatán it refers to the cacomixtle, an entirely different animal.

*Perico ligero* in Costa Rica means the local form of sloth (the two-toed species), whereas in Guatemala and in some parts of Mexico it refers to the large member of the weasel family we call "tayra".

I merely mention these anomalies to emphasise the sorting out that has to be done by any dilettante naturalist who travels over an extensive area in Latin America.

I believe the Mexican has a deep-seated regard for animals; there is nothing demonstrative about it, and it looks more like tolerance than affection. Country folk all the world over, whether from necessity or choice, live close to their domestic animals (one recalls the reputation of the Irish peasant and his pigs) but the country people of Mexico seem to go even further in this respect. Any poor family is surrounded by very tame turkeys, fowls, pigs and dogs. (Many of the dogs, it must be admitted, look undernourished, but most dogs in Mexico are ownerless, and there seems to be a general understanding that one ignores ownerless dogs.) Nevertheless the attitude of the other animals mentioned shows without doubt that they have complete confidence in their owners, even if the latter fail to indulge in demonstrative sentimentality when the time for parting arrives, and dispatch them dispassionately and humanely when it is expedient. A journey in any public vehicle in rural Mexico brings the traveller into literally direct contact

with live fowls, turkeys, piglets or even armadillos, the latter with their feet carefully tied together. Most of them are doubtless bound directly or indirectly for the stew-pot, but meanwhile they are treated considerately. Mexicans never maltreat their horses and burros, and the lot of these animals is much better than that of their kind in Spain.

The Indians, particularly, are fond of parrots and parakeets, and Indian patience is an advantage in teaching them to talk, which some kinds do superlatively well. All Mexico loves cage-birds, which are brought up to the capital in large quantities and great variety. The most popular of these are tiny creatures of bright tropical plumage, and a sombre thrush-like bird called *cenzontle*, the finest singer of them all. In the spring and early summer parrots and parakeets reach the markets of Mexico City by the hundred, often in a half-fledged state, which ensures their complete tameness from the beginning. As a rule only three kinds can be found thus in the metropolitan markets—the yellow-crowned Amazon (*Amazona oratrix*) which is the best talker, another Amazon (*A. autumnalis*) with a blue-and-red forehead, which is supposed not to be able to learn to talk, and the commonest parakeet in the country (*Aratinga canicularis*), which is brought up in great numbers from the hot Pacific coastal region.

In April every year Mexico City has an open-air dog-show in the grounds of the Botanical Institute. It is much like other shows, with the world's best-known breeds most in evidence, though there seems to be a special vogue for such uncommon breeds as Lhasa and Maltese terriers. But the most interesting animals to be seen are the breeds of native Mexican dogs already mentioned. These are nowadays far from numerous, even in their native land.

The "Chihuahua" is an insignificant animal about the size of the "Papillon" with an apparently variable coat and, frequently, an anatomical peculiarity, in that its rather broad skull has a deep narrow cavity in the centre which can be felt with the finger. It is said to be a native of the state after which it is named, and to live in the rocky deserts, though, to see the animal, it is hard to believe that it would be capable of catching anything to cat.

In the 1943 dog-show there were three or four examples of the famous "Mexican hairless dog". I have never encountered any except these show specimens, and they are no longer numerous, though before the Conquest they were sufficiently common to have been almost a staple article of diet (see Chapter IV, *re* burials in Colima). To-day, I believe, there are still a few in the Yaqui region of Southern Sonora, and according to G. Gaumer, the animal was plentiful in Yucatán in the last century. He refers to it as *Perro mudo* (it is in fact completely mute) and as the *Canis caribbaeus* of Linnæus. The examples seen at this show were of two different forms, known by the Aztec names of *xoloizcuintle* and *tepeizcuintle*. (The first word means "bare dog"; and the second "rock dog". It is curious that the latter word is used also for the rodent we call "paca", which I have already mentioned. The Mexican name for agouti is generally spelled *tepescuintle*, but it is undoubtedly the same word.) The canine *tepeizcuintle* is illustrated in the accompanying photograph.

The *xoloizcuintle*, of which there was one example only, is a repugnant creature of about the build of a large whippet, completely hairless, and with a skin that appears to be covered with warts. The *tepeizcuintles* are smaller, but more solidly built, and less unpleasant to look upon. Their skin is smooth and tends to be spotted pink and grey, and on the top of the skull they have a tuft of sandy-coloured straight soft hair. These "hairless" dogs, I understand, nowadays command very considerable prices, in common with many other things in Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

Every August, i.e., at the height of the rainy season, a large agricultural show is held at Popotla, a suburb to the north-west

<sup>1</sup> Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, Mexico's most authoritative descriptive historian, writing around the middle of the sixteenth century, makes the following reference to these animals: "The native dogs are known by five different names: *Chichi*, *Itzcuintli*, *Xochiocoyoll*, *Tellamln* and *Teuitzoll*. Completely hairless dogs, *Lampiños*, are bred, and others which are semi-hairless. Another small variety is called *Xoloitzcuintli*, quite naked, and they are given at night time little coats in which to sleep. These dogs are not born in this condition, but while still puppies they are anointed with a substance called *oxitl*, which causes the coat to drop off, leaving the body very shiny. On the other hand, it is said that in the towns of Teotlixco and Toztlan the puppies are naked at birth. There are other dogs called *Tlatchichi*, short of stature and fat, which are excellent to eat."

of Mexico City. All kinds of domestic utility animals are exhibited, from carrier-pigeons to horses. The cattle classes are very large, but it seems that only five utility breeds are taken seriously in Mexico—the Holstein-Frisian, the Brown Swiss, the Hereford, the Jersey and the Zebu. Zebu breeding is still more or less in its experimental stage, but the race thrives in certain tropical and semi-tropical areas.

I have never seen such enormous stud boars as are exhibited at this show. They defy description. It looks as though the breeders are really aiming at Bigger, if not Better, Pigs, for on one occasion I saw two vast prone expanses of porcine flesh labelled "Graf Zeppelin" and "R.101"!

The horse introduced by the Spaniards into Mexico at the time of the Conquest, and subsequently, was a mixture of the Arab, Andalusian and Berber strains. This original stock was later influenced by introduction of English and of further Arab blood, and a definite physical evolution is noticeable since the Conquest.

The horses of Mexico fall roughly into two sub-divisions—the type adopted by the Mexican Army's cavalry, and the so-called *charro* horse.

The great majority of cavalry mounts now have a proportion of English blood, for in recent years an effort has been made to improve their type, and particularly their size, by the systematic introduction of stud animals of English strain. Self-coloured animals only are accepted in the cavalry regiments, each of which has horses all of one colour—either *prietos* (blacks), *retintos* (browns), *colorados* (chestnuts), or *alazanes* (bays).

In Mexico the expert subdivides these colours into a profusion of others, according to the exact shade of the animal. This also applies to *tordillos* (greys), *rosillos* (roans) and *palominos* or *bayos* (duns). Mexican equine terms have developed independently of those used in other Latin American countries. Even as near as El Salvador, a confusingly different set of expressions is employed.

The antecedents of the *charro* horse are roughly the same as those of the cavalry mount, but there is less English influence, and special breeding has in the course of time produced an animal of a different type, both structurally and tempera-



A Totonac woman from the State of Vera Cruz, wearing head-dress similar to the Yalalag "rodete"



A young Totonac couple from Mazátepec, State of Puebla.



*Right (top).* A fine Zapotec type from Oaxaca.  
*(below).* A "Zapoteco-serrana" (mountain Zapotec woman) in her gala finery.



A pair of prize-winning *tepeizcuintles* (Mexican hairless dogs), bred by Señor H. Falko. Photo by courtesy of the owner. (*page 127*)

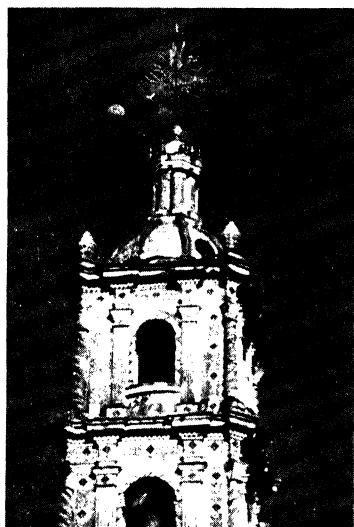
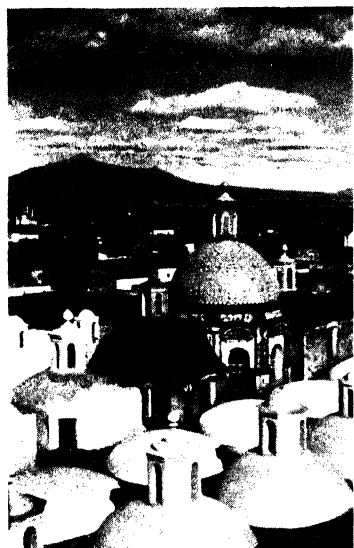


Mexico's chief scavengers—the *zopilotes* (*left*). The black vulture. (*right*). The turkey vulture. (*page 119*)



Sea-lions at their breeding-colony on the Island of San Pedro Nolasco, Gulf of California. (page 118)





*Top (left).* Cupolas of the Franciscan “Capilla Real” at Cholula, Puebla. *(right).* The Augustinian church at Ixmiquilpan, State of Hidalgo. (page 136)

*Below (left).* The ornate bellry of the church of Tlaxcalantongo, in the style known as “Indian Baroque”. *(right).* Panotla Church, Tlaxcala, a fine ultra-baroque building.

mentally. The *charro* breeders are less conservative about colour than the military authorities, and, indeed, piebalds, roans and duns are very popular in *charro* circles.

This seems to be a logical place to mention food, as this important factor in the life of any country depends to a large extent on its fauna and flora.

The leit-motifs of all really Mexican food are maize, and *frijoles* and hot *chili* peppers.

The maize makes its appearance in the form of *tortillas*—very thin flap-jacks which are of much more importance to the Mexican than bread—or in a pulpy mass contained in a maize leaf (called a *tamal*), or purely and simply as corn-on-the-cob, the *elote*.

*Frijoles*, of which there are many types, are beans about the size of the Rangoon variety—that which appears in tins as “baked beans”. They are excellent and very nutritious.

The *chilis* which, in one form or another, the Mexican uses to flavour almost everything, are of varying degrees of strength, and the Mexican peasant likes his victuals to be of a hotness which most foreigners find it difficult to stomach. From what little I know of Asiatic food, I should say that the Mexican diet is, on the whole, more *picante* than the Indian, but Miguel Covarrubias, the Mexican author and artist, states from experience that it is considerably less so than, for example, Balinese diet.

Not a great deal of meat is eaten by the majority of people. The most popular meat dishes are the *moles*, which can best be defined as goulashes of turkey or chicken, cooked in a dark-brown fiery sauce, of which the main ingredient is the ever-present *chili*. *Barbacoa* (barbecue) of mutton or lamb is also a favourite, and at any market one sees enormous bowls filled with succulent pieces of steaming hot barbecue, which disappear rapidly, and for which little money seems to change hands.

In the last few years the progressive and scientific attitude of the United States towards dietetics has shown signs of having some slight repercussions in Mexico. Thinking people are beginning to wonder whether the basic diet is not inadequate, and if it is not in fact one of the deep-set causes of Mexico's

backwardness in some respects. I have read more than one thoughtful article on these lines in Mexican magazines. But a nation-wide culinary campaign would be anything but easy. Whatever the merits or demerits of *chili*, for example, the taste and craving for it are so ingrained in the more Indian element of the populace, that when, late in 1942, the first contingents of Indian conscripts were called to the colours, an even hotter diet than the usual one had to be devised for some of them, if they were to enjoy their food. I believe that those who clamoured most loudly for this reform were Huastec Indians, from the north of the State of Vera Cruz, where the particularly fiery sort of *chili* is grown and eaten in large quantities.

Mexico's very long coastline means that there is any amount of fish to be had, but it is not much eaten in country districts inland, partly owing to conservatism, and partly to lack of communications. The king of Mexican fish, from the point of view of the gourmet, is the *huachinango* (the Americans call it "red snapper"), a brilliant red bream-shaped fish which may attain a weight of twenty pounds. People who know the Spanish text of that sentimental and hackneyed song *La Paloma* have probably asked themselves what on earth a *huachinango* is; this is the answer.

In the larger towns, vegetables, and fruit, are plentiful all the year round in great variety, and include such familiar sorts as *sandías* (water melons), cantaloupe melons, oranges, limes and pine-apples—and, of course, bananas and plantains of many shapes, colours and sizes. The local tropical fruits contribute greatly to the colourfulness of the markets. The most interesting ones are: the mango, the *zapote negro*, the *chicozapote*, the *mamey*, the passion fruit, and the *chirimoya* (called in English "custard apple"). An excellent, though relatively little-known, fruit is the *caimito*, which grows only in the south-east of the country; the *pitahaya* is the colourful, refreshing, though rather anæmic-tasting fruit of a large kind of cactus. The poor people eat and enjoy the fruit (*tuna*) and young tender shoots (*nopal*) of a kind of prickly pear, but they are not much appreciated by others.

It is widely believed that the word "chocolate" is derived from a similar Aztec word—*xocolatl*—and it is well known that

the highest strata in the Aztec Empire imbibed various concoctions containing chocolate. There is, however, no evidence that the name *xocolatl* was used at the time, for the beverages were known as *cacaoatl*—that is, cacao with water.

Cacao, or, more familiarly, cocoa, was doubtless grown in Mexico, but it was probably cultivated more intensively farther south, where the climatic combination of moisture and heat was more favourable to the tree's growth.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE ARTS

PLASTIC art in Mexico divides itself conveniently into four sections—pre-Hispanic art, Colonial art, Folk art, and Modern art.

Although these four categories are in contrast one with the other, only the pre-Hispanic is independent of the rest.

Colonial art, represented above all by ecclesiastical architecture and decoration, was of course European in basic concept, but it soon took on superficial characteristics which were different from contemporary forms in Spain. The architects were Spaniards, but the people who executed their orders were Indians, and the latter allowed their own personality to be seen in the ornamental motifs which they sculpted. Their Indian origin was reflected in their work.

As pure Spanish blood thinned and the environment of the Colony began to affect artistic inspiration, even the basic concepts began to diverge from those of the mother country, and later Colonial architecture in Mexico acquired characteristics all its own.

Similarly, folk art, which is manifested in all the humble little things made by the Indians and the *mestizos* from the Conquest to the present day, is a combination of the Indian and the non-Indian. It includes forms for which inspiration is drawn both from pagan, indigenous traditions, and from Christian, non-Indian ideas.

Lastly, modern art, of which the most important manifestation is twentieth century painting, is entirely Mexican. It reflects, in its own way, the modern Mexican scene, whilst identifying itself consciously with the indigenous. Twentieth-century painters know how to capture an atmosphere which successfully fuses the characteristics of the various components of the human crucible that is modern Mexico.

A great deal has been written, both by Mexicans and foreigners, about art of the pre-Hispanic, Colonial and Modern

categories, but it seems that folk art, or *arte popular*, has been less studied.

### *Pre-Columbian Art*

Earlier in this book, in a chapter on archæology, I briefly reviewed the most important aspects of pre-Cortésian art in the media of clay and stone, and gave some indications as to which of the ancient peoples attained the highest artistic levels, and in what manner they expressed themselves most eloquently. Parts of that chapter were in effect a review of art in Mexico before the Conquest, for it is impossible to divorce the artistic aspect of antiquities from any archæological study.

"Art for art's sake" is, I think, limited in the present case to decoration on clay vessels and similar objects, for every sculpture, every figurine and every other clay or stone relic of these people served some purpose other than that of pure adornment, even if we are not always able to define that purpose.

Some of these civilisations, however, carried on another activity, which, even though dedicated to a utilitarian purpose, must for certain reasons be classified as a form of art. I refer to the writing of codices and *lienzos*<sup>1</sup> by the more highly developed races. These documents have come down to us in some number from the Aztecs; three of Mayan origin exist, and a few are known from southern Mexico, attributed to the Zapotec and Mixtec civilisations of Oaxaca.

It is in the nature of things that whenever it has been possible to decipher these documents, their contribution to knowledge of the history of the people who made them has been greater than the parallel contributions of the stone monuments. The exception to this is the Old Mayan Empire. We have probably learned as much from the stelæ as from the later, New Empire codices which refer to the earlier period.

Had these peoples evolved a writing in any way comparable with utilitarian script-forms, these documents would

<sup>1</sup> Manuscripts. The "codex" is really an unbound book of a varying number of sheets, also of a varying material. The *lienzo* is properly one document, the material being a sort of cloth.

hardly come under the heading of "art", but their technique of writing was based on pictographic or ideographic hieroglyphs, in some respects comparable with those of the ancient Egyptians. Consequently, even a simple text appears as an elaborate and colourful picture, and its scribe had to be a competent draughtsman, at least.

These codices have by no means been entirely deciphered, so far-fetched is some of the symbolism, and so numerous and variable are the symbols used. But many of the less abstruse references have been understood, and have duly contributed to man's knowledge of history before the Europeans arrived.

The greatest number of codices and *lienzos* are, as stated above, of Aztec origin. Lord Kingsborough's monumental work *Antiquities of Mexico*, published in 1831/48, consists of reproductions in colour of all the more important codices that he was able to locate. Most of the originals are in Seville, others in various libraries and museums of Europe and the United States, and a small proportion in the Museo Nacional in Mexico City. Crying over spilt milk is not a profitable occupation, but one cannot help regretting the fact that such a large proportion of these documents perished owing to religious zeal in the early Colonial period.

The codices from southern Mexico are analogous to the Aztec ones in their manner of painting and in the type of symbols, but the three from Yucatán are quite different in their conception, and the ideographs used are an evolved form of the glyphs sculpted on the stelæ of the Old Mayan Empire.

The Aztecs were experts in turquoise inlay and ornamental feather work, of which a very few examples have been in Europe since Cortés sent them to the Spanish emperor early in the sixteenth century as an eloquent testimony of the richness of the country he had conquered.

### *Colonial Art*

The most important manifestation of art in Mexico's Colonial period is church architecture, just as contemporary forms of this have been of artistic importance in most Christian countries.

Churches and monasteries, apart from their relative permanence, probably reflect more changes of style and manner, and manifest "art for art's sake" more consistently than do lay buildings, whether public or private.

In Mexico City and elsewhere in the country, there naturally exist to-day very many non-ecclesiastical Colonial structures, but a study of most of them contributes relatively little to a knowledge of the architectural trends of the period. The evolution of church architecture from the earliest times until Independence is a fascinating study, however.

The first Christian churches built in Mexico were the work of the Franciscan, Augustinian and Dominican Orders, and were almost invariably associated with monasteries or convents.<sup>1</sup> Most of the monastery cloisters, owing to the present peculiar relationship between the Church and the Mexican State, are nowadays in indifferent repair, if not completely ruined.

These earliest buildings were generally very solidly built and relatively unadorned. They can be classified as "fortified churches", for conditions at the time of their construction were such as to make defence a consideration of primordial importance. Gothic, Romanesque, Mudéjar, and even Moorish influences are common in these buildings, just as they were in contemporary churches in Spain. They are basically Spanish, although adapted to local conditions in respect of solidity and austerity. Some of them were subsequently adorned in unclassifiable Indian styles, or in what is known as "Mexican plateresque", as the vogue for ornamentation and lavishness grew, with the gradual stabilisation of the country.

The earliest and most austere of all these buildings are those of the Franciscan Order. Some of the most outstanding examples are the churches and monasteries at the following places:

Huejotzingo, State of Puebla, founded in 1525;

The mission of San Francisco at Tlaxcala (State of Tlaxcala) (built in the form of a basilica);

Cuernavaca, State of Morelos (now the cathedral), founded in 1529;

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish words *convento* and *monasterio* do not, as in English, indicate the sex of the occupants, and it is not always possible to determine whether a mission was one of monks or nuns.



Tepeaca, State of Puebla, founded in 1530. An ultra-solid construction, considered by some to be the finest Franciscan edifice of all;

Tlalmanalco, State of Mexico. The convent cloisters are now in a semi-ruined condition, but they are noteworthy for the splendid "Indian plateresque" ornamentation on the archivolts;

San Francisco, Cholula, State of Puebla, and its adjacent Capilla Real, founded 1549. The remarkable Capilla is in the form of a basilica, and shows Moorish influence.

The Augustinians, who arrived in New Spain a little later, built slightly less austere and more graceful churches, which were, however, hardly less solid than the earlier ones.

The following magnificent buildings are examples of Augustinian foundation:

The church of Yecapixtla, State of Morelos, founded in 1535, showing much Gothic influence;

San Agustín Acolman, State of Mexico, founded in 1539 or 1540. The church shows superb plateresque ornamentation on the west front;

Actopan, State of Hidalgo, founded in 1546. The church has a curious lateral chapel;

Ixmiquilpan, State of Hidalgo, founded in 1548;

Yuriripundaro, State of Guanajuato, founded in 1548 or 1550.

Next, the Dominican Order began building, and erected numerous very fine churches; in style they are similar to those already mentioned, but Dominican edifices have a grandeur and magnificence introduced at the expense of austerity. Probably the finest Dominican churches that can now be seen in Mexico are those at:

Tepoztlán, State of Morelos, founded in 1560;

Coixtlahuaca, State of Oaxaca, founded in 1576, showing strong Indian influence in its decoration; and

Yanhuitlán, State of Oaxaca, built between 1550 and 1575.

The little-known Yanhuitlán church is one of the most impressive buildings I know in the country. The hamlet of Yanhuitlán lies some miles north-west of the town of Nochixtlán, in the Mixteca Alta, and it has only become accessible by

road, since the Pan-American Highway section from Puebla to Oaxaca was opened in 1943. The church is visible for many miles in all directions—a gigantic piece of beautifully sun-mellowed masonry, completely dwarfing every building in the vicinity. From some angles it appears rather barn-like, but from others it is graceful, as well as impressive. The apse and flying buttress at its eastern end are noteworthy, and the beautiful interior has fine vaulting and woodwork. Its general condition, unfortunately, is poor, and unless repairs are soon undertaken this magnificent building will deteriorate dangerously.

Later than the three Orders already referred to came the Jesuits (1572) and the Carmelites. The former have no architecture which can be called their own, though they were responsible for much of the most lavish church ornamentation. Carmelite buildings are as a rule humble, and devoid of great artistic merit.

Many of these earlier churches, and indeed some later ones, were built on the tops of hills, though, as their architects were Spaniards, this peculiarity can hardly be quoted as a continuation of Indian tradition. Others were constructed on top of pagan temples—a clear proof of their architects' religious intolerance. Examples of this are the church of San Pablo Apóstol, at Mitla, Oaxaca, beneath and around which masonry of an earlier Zapotec religious building is visible; and Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, which now crowns the great Toltec pyramid at Cholula.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century Indian decorative sculpture took on certain forms, and is usually referred to in Mexico as "Indian plateresque"—the word "plateresque" being applied to contemporary Renaissance sculpture in Spain. This form of decoration flourished in and on the churches, the hitherto rather bare walls of which were henceforth embellished by more ornamental portals. The Indian influence is frequently visible in such things as curiously naïve representations of the human body, and in Indian detail, including even hieroglyphs, introduced into purely Christian heraldic devices.

Monastic building, except by the Jesuits and Carmelites, gradually ceased, giving place to secular construction, and the

need for solid defensible churches died a natural death. The Baroque Period began. The existing cathedrals were extended and adorned, new cathedrals started, and ornamentation and luxury intensified. In some directions, the Indian, or rather, non-European, origin of the labour began to leave its impress more strongly than before. In the course of time, Baroque took on special forms, and typical manifestations of it are loosely known as "Mexican Baroque", "Indian Baroque", "Florid Baroque" and "Polychrome Baroque". These forms are typically Mexican and contrast with the classical Spanish and Italian Baroques. They soon involved a widespread use of multicoloured tiles on the cupolas, and in extreme cases these invaded even the inside and outside of the church walls. These *azulejos* were mainly made in Puebla; their best types are known as *Talavera de Puebla*, after the glazed pottery from the Spanish town of Talavera. They either have individual designs, or jointly form a picture, and are extremely pleasing, whether individually or *en masse*.

In 1925 Señor José Benítez catalogued 12,757 Colonial religious buildings as still standing in the Republic. By far the majority of these are Baroque of one form or another. Outstanding examples of Baroque churches are the following, though some of them may have parts or later additions of a specialised character:

Most of the cathedral of Mexico City (in construction from 1581-1667);

Parts of the cathedral of Morelia;

The *colegiata* at Taxco, State of Guerrero, probably Mexico's most photographed church;

The church of Santo Domingo, at Oaxaca City, considered by some to be the finest church in the country; it is also said to have been the most costly one;

Parts of the church of Tepotzotlán, State of Mexico, which shows traces of many styles and periods (including the earliest; there is a Mudéjar mark on one exterior wall); the west front and the interior decoration are later, and are classical examples of Churrigueresque, or Ultra-Baroque, adornment;

The church of San Francisco Ecatepec, near Cholula,

State of Puebla, which is a multicoloured building in so-called Polychrome Baroque, with a very Indian interior (recently, I believe, badly damaged by fire);

The church of Santa María Tonanzintla, also near Cholula, comparable with the foregoing one;

The church of San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, and the church of Tlacolula. Both in the State of Oaxaca. These two Indian village churches are hardly outstanding externally, but have very remarkable interiors;

The church of Lagos de Moreno, State of Jalisco, a very pure, rather austere, and very late Baroque building, constructed by the purist architect Tresguerras.

Meanwhile, in the first half of the seventeenth century, a new style of architecture had been introduced. This represented the influence of Herrera, and reflected the sober lines of the Escorial in Spain. It made for austerity, simplicity, and architectural purism, and found little favour in Mexico, where the demand was for something more flamboyant and alive. The best example of it is probably a part of the cathedral at Puebla.

Almost a century later, just as in Europe the Rococo style developed from Baroque, so in Mexico the latter had its logical culmination, known somewhat misleadingly as Churrigueresque, though more properly termed Ultra-Baroque (Churrigueresque was a Spanish architect responsible for the highly elaborate altar-pieces in Spanish churches; he had nothing to do with Mexico directly). This vogue for ultra-ostentatious adornment began to affect everything in church architecture. Many churches built at this period are entirely in this style, such as:

Nuestra Señora de Ocotlán, Tlaxcala, built about 1745;

Santa Rosa de Viterbo, at Querétaro;

Panotla, State of Tlaxcala<sup>1</sup>;

Zacatecas (the cathedral).

Many earlier churches were now given Ultra-Baroque mural ornamentation, such as that at Tepotzotlán, already mentioned. Other buildings received whole new wings in this style, as in the case of the *sagrario* (sacristy) of Mexico City's cathedral.

<sup>1</sup> It is not certain whether the decoration on this building dates from the church's construction or was added later.

Extremely ornate façades, highly elaborate portals, and gilded retables covering the whole of one end-wall of the church, are the most general expressions of the Ultra-Baroque ornamental technique. The style is generally considered as Mexico's most eloquent and personal contribution to architecture, though the earlier Florid and Polychrome Baroque forms are certainly no less national in character.

At the end of the eighteenth century, a reaction to this overburdened detail took place, and the neo-classical style was born, just before Independence. The church of El Carmen at Celaya, in the State of Guanajuato, completed around 1805, is doubtless the best example of neo-classicism in the country.

After 1810, the protracted strife in the new-born Republic reduced church-building to a minimum. The quarrel between Church and State indeed had the opposite effect, for more churches were in existence than were needed. Many were, and still are, used otherwise than for worship; Mexico City's National Library is housed in what was once the Baroque church of San Agustín. Many were damaged or destroyed during the *Reforma* of 1858 to 1868, and the revolution of 1910 to 1922 eliminated a good many more.

Nevertheless, a few new churches are built nowadays, and repairs to old ones are occasionally carried out. A rather remarkable achievement is to be seen at the church of Zapotlanejo, in the State of Jalisco. Around 1922 an unknown architect undertook the construction of two towers for this church, which had previously either been towerless or in a very bad state of repair. Though the new structures show neo-classical influence, they are by no means unworthy of the original structure.

The general architectural trends outlined went more or less hand in hand with interior decoration, including both sculpture and painting. As has been indicated, with the development of the more elaborate Baroque forms, and above all of Ultra-Baroque, the taste for ornate interiors grew, and the richness of decoration in some churches has to be seen to be believed. At Tepotzotlán, the interior is so overpoweringly rich, that only extremely capable handling has saved it from being tawdry. The retable, or background of the *santuario*,

is a vast screen covering the whole of the wall, and its gilded structure is so ornate, that not a single flat surface is left. Solid gold leaf was not only adroitly applied to altar-pieces, but also to the delicate wooden figures which abound in some of the churches, and which nowadays are often to be had in the antique shops of Mexico City. These figures were first made in Mexico in the sixteenth century, but the technique, known as *estofado*, was not fully developed until two centuries later. This *estofado* system involved covering all the figure's vestments with a thin layer of gold, which was then burnished; the pattern of the robes was then punched out, and rich colours inserted in the perforations in the gold leaf. The results, which are very durable, are delicate and most pleasing.

In the realm of painting, religious pictures of some merit were being painted around 1650, and vast oil paintings done on the cloister walls were popular. Later, the cold and sober influence of Zurbarán reached the colony, but it aroused little enthusiasm, in much the same way that Herrera's style of architecture had been a flop a few decades earlier. After this, Mexican artists seem to have taken stock of themselves, and finally, after drawing on a variety of sources, they developed a style, known as the Baroque style of painting, which was alive, restless and vigorous.

With the arrival of Ultra-Baroque ornament and architecture, painting suffered a setback. It looks as though all worthwhile artistic creativeness flowed into plastic form, no inspiration remaining for two-dimensional art. Nevertheless, the lesser lights increased their production, but it was at the expense of quality. Murillo's paintings arrived in Mexico; he was copied *ad nauseam* in a superficial way, and the mediocrities of the "Murillo School" produced æsthetically valueless canvases which were merely an empty reflection of the master's themes and colour combinations.

In general terms, Mexican painting does not again seem to have achieved anything of importance until the twentieth century, when it reappears as "Modern Art".

Silver is one of the country's most plentiful assets, and it was worked throughout the Colonial era. The Indians were taught to fashion Christian articles, and we find here the same signs

of Indian execution of Christian motifs as in the plateresque sculpture. An interesting example of this is to be found in the workmanship of the handsome silver crosses made in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries, apparently exclusively in the mountains of Oaxaca. These crosses were referred to in Chapter III in the description of a journey to Yalalag, and some of them are illustrated there. These articles have been very little studied, and even the leading experts on Colonial and Folk arts know almost nothing about them.

The scarce earlier types are merely flat cruciform sheets of silver, usually with three feathers forming each extremity, and they bear naïve, and in each case different, crudely engraved representations of the Signs of the Passion on either side. The more sophisticated and elaborately moulded forms of cross, also shown, are attributed to the seventeenth century, and they no longer show such direct evidence of Indian workmanship. These were almost certainly the equivalent of the European rosary crucifixes.

There are to be found in Mexico numbers of old hardwood Colonial chests, sometimes beautifully carved, and with fine elaborate locks of great charm. Amongst these *arcones* are also a number of Asiatic origin. The latter were made apparently especially for Mexico, and are of cedarwood, covered with finely painted leather, and studded and bound with brass. They were brought in quantity from, it is believed, the Philippines, by the Spanish merchant ships which put in at the Pacific port of Acapulco, and they can be considered almost as Mexican articles, as their makers evidently catered especially for the tastes in the Spanish colony.

Bookbinding and illustrating flourished in the monasteries much as it did in Spain, and Mexico lagged behind the mother country very little in respect of quality, though the output of works of this type in the colony was smaller than at home. Old maps prepared in Mexico are nowadays very scarce, and nearly all the mapping of the period seems to have been undertaken by Europeans, with Frenchmen and Dutchmen in the forefront.

*Folk Art*

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, folk art embraces a wide variety of things made all over the Republic, and has some of its origins in the pre-Conquest period. It includes articles made for personal use, for ritual and ceremonial purposes, and, lately, for sale, particularly to tourists. Much of the *arte popular* takes the form of objects of relatively little permanence, with the result that we are unable to examine their evolution throughout the centuries. The most important forms of folk-art are pottery of many types, articles of lacquered and painted wood, weaving, wicker- and straw-work, wooden ceremonial and dance masks, and the painted thanksgiving offerings, *ex-votos*. Of these, only the masks, wooden articles and *ex-votos* usually achieve any age, and so we can only review the contemporary forms of the remainder.

It may be as well to consider popular pottery first. This is mostly in the form of vessels for utility purposes, and small toys of infinite variety. Every market in the country sells quantities of earthenware vessels of every shape and size, for most country folk and all lowly households use this type of vessel both in which to cook and from which to eat. (Metal cooking utensils or porcelain crockery are rarities in these circles.) These clay articles are fashioned in countless centres, and most centres have their own special style. The vessels range from the simplest and crudest forms to glazed and painted types, and though they are possibly of interest, as reflecting to some extent the traditional ornamental motifs of each region, most of them nowadays cannot be called artistic.

There are, however, one or two exceptions.

The little-known village of Patamba in the mountains of Michoacán, inhabited by Tarascan Indians, is noteworthy for a specially fine type of pottery, and well over half the families that live there make their living as potters. In 1944, Señor Ricardo Pozas Arciniega undertook a detailed study of the methods and products of this place, as it is one of the few villages in the country where an unbroken tradition persists as to the type of decoration applied to its pottery. At last the

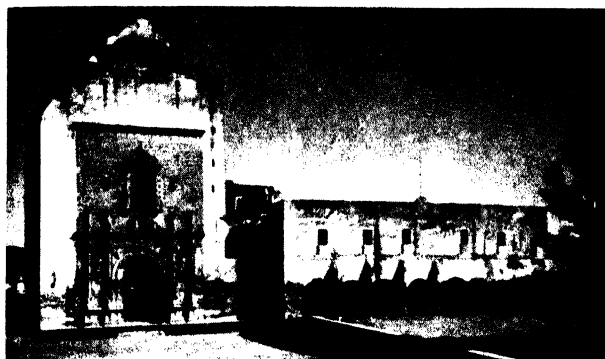


Patambeños, unfortunately, are abandoning their traditional forms for a less conservative technique, more likely to be acceptable to the tourist and the philistine, but the genuine article is still obtainable there if asked for. The Patamba *cántaros*, or water-pitchers, are thin and elegant in form, and when finished have a high red glaze with finely executed line drawings of flowers, humming-birds and a variety of other birds and animals. I am indebted to Señor Pozas for the loan of the *cántaro* illustrated in the accompanying photograph. It is a good example of typical Patamba work.

Other villages still producing fine pottery with their "own" ornamentation are Tolimán and Zumpango del Río, in the State of Guerrero, and Metepec, in the State of Mexico. Metepec potters make a great variety of articles, including polychromed toys of an original character.

The largest and most important centre for pottery in Mexico is the town of San Pedro Tlaquepaque, close to the city of Guadalajara. This place produces vast quantities of pottery of many types, which is sent all over the Republic, and even exported. Whilst undoubtedly some of the things that come from Tlaquepaque are of outstanding merit, others are in bad taste, and extremely garish. The most popular Tlaquepaque product is probably the colourful glazed tableware, featuring "typical" Mexican scenes. This is somewhat reminiscent of Devonshire tea-sets, but it can hardly be called a true example of folk art, being mass-produced by large firms employing many artisans, who have little occasion to indulge their personal fancy or instinctive inspiration.

This is not the case, however, at Coyótepec, near the city of Oaxaca, which is the main pottery-producing centre for the whole of the Zapotec area. The Coyótepec products are purely Indian in technique, and, until recently, also in conception. The most important types are black earthenware pots and small toys with a crude finish. The material might be mistaken for pure carbon at first glance, for most of the articles are unglazed, having at best a dull blue-black sheen. The Coyótepec people also make a variety of articles, finished with a high glaze of bright green. Most of these are traditionally Indian in subject; the accompanying photograph shows a set



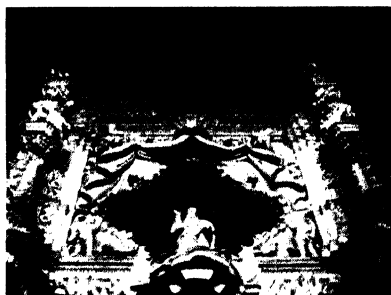
The west front  
of the Augustinian church  
of Acolman,  
State of  
Mexico.  
(page 136)

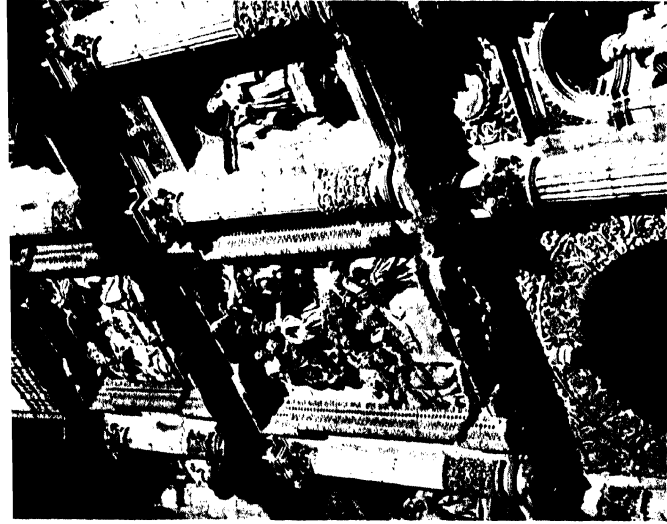
The west front  
of the vast  
Dominican  
church at  
Yanhuitlán,  
State of Oaxaca.  
(page 136)



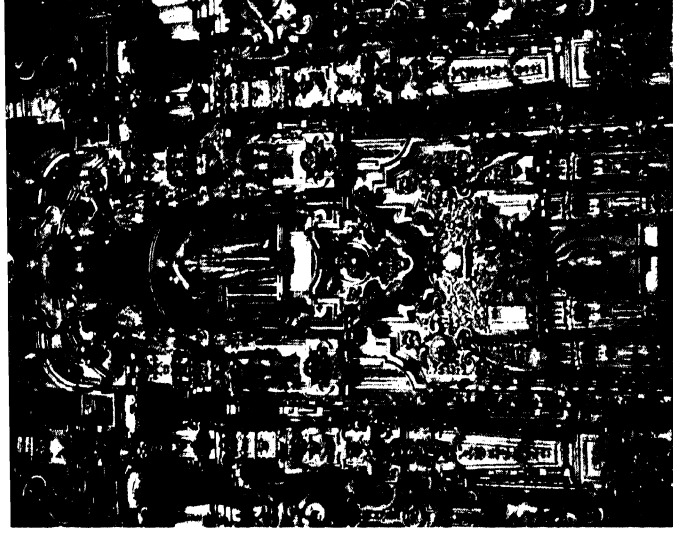
Detail of the plateresque  
sculpture on an archivolt  
of the Franciscan convent  
of Tlalmanalco, State of  
Mexico. (page 136)

Detail of the west front of  
Panotla Church, Tlax-  
cala (ultra-baroque).  
(page 139)





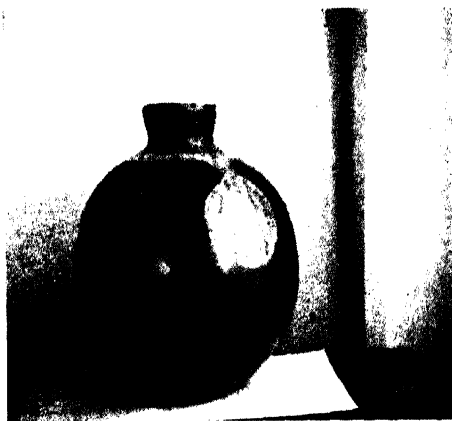
Baroque detail, Oaxaca Cathedral.



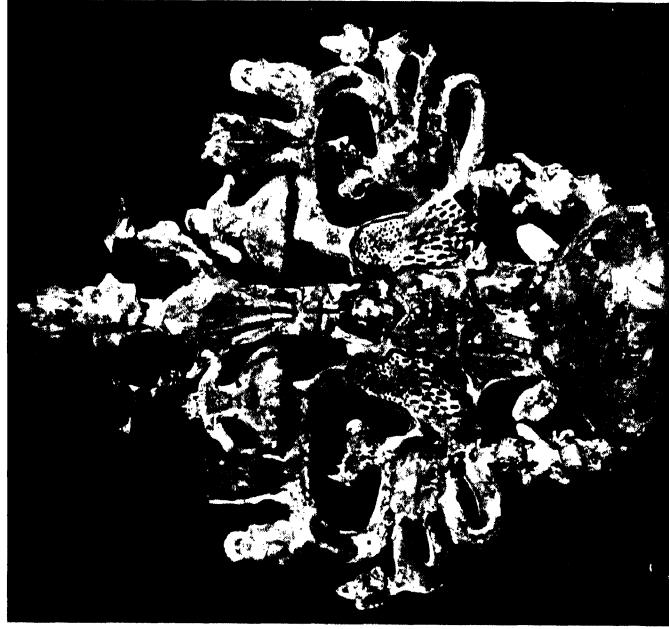
Part of the gilt ultra-baroque retablo in the church of Tepetzotlán, State of Mexico.  
(*page 140*).



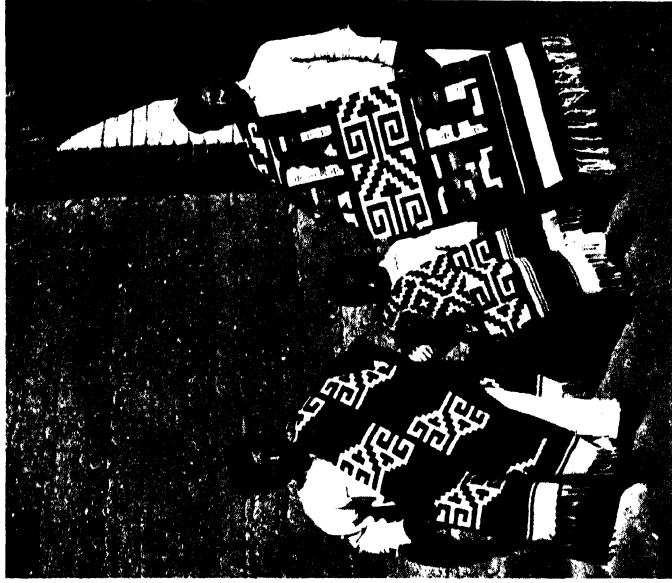
Zapotec toys from Coyótepec, made of clay with a high, dark-green glaze. (The fountain pen illustrates their size.) (page 144)



A fine specimen of a "cántaro" from  
Patamba, Michoacan.  
(page 143)



Eighteenth-century funerary candelabrum from the Matamoros Izucar district, State of Puebla.  
(page 145)



Zapotecs with gaudy *sarapes* for tourists.  
(page 146)

of small Coyótepec toys, representing a group of grotesque animals apparently indulging in a musical feast. In recent years, however, the Coyótepec potters have pandered to the tourist trade by making, in this green material, mediocre and tawdry reproductions of old Indian deities, candlesticks, and the like, which have nothing in common with their traditional products.

Another article of clay which deserves mention is an interesting form of Indian funerary candelabrum which appears to come only from the district of Matamoros Izucar, in the south of the State of Puebla. These candelabra are made of a heavy solid clay, and are richly coloured, being ornamented with naïve effigies of Christian angels, small female figures and impressionistic doves representing the Holy Ghost. The one illustrated here is unusually old, and is attributed to the first half of the eighteenth century. I am unable to say whether these candelabra are still made for their original purpose, but a number of very glaring new ones find their way to the capital, where they are bought by tourists.

I have referred, under the heading of "Colonial Art", to the *azulejos*, or glazed polychrome tiles, the manufacture of which centred around the city of Puebla. These can hardly be considered as folk art, but in the town of Sayula, Jalisco, in the last century some attractive pottery was made, which is most reminiscent of the *azulejos*. Sayula pottery is now rare, for the art has been lost.

The wooden masks already mentioned are of infinite variety, and generally highly grotesque. They have always been used for religious purposes, ritual dances, and so on. This is still their use, even in connection with purely Christian ceremonies, such as the annual festival at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, just outside Mexico City.

At one end of the scale are the massive and hideous purely pagan Cora masks from Nayarit, which recall those of certain African tribes. Contrasting with these are the more evolved and imaginative forms which reflect European facial traits, horned devils and bulls. These are found in less remote areas, where the people have for long been associated with things non-Indian. Somewhere between these two extremes lie the

interesting antlered deer-masks used by the Yaquis of Sonora in their traditional *danza del venado* (deer dance).

Lacquered woodwork of quality is now made, I believe, only by the Tarascans of Michoacán and in the town of Olinálá, in Guerrero. In both lacquer-work and wood-painting the Tarascans excel, and they are probably the finest modern Indian artisans. They have a special technique for the production and application of lacquer, employing certain natural materials, including one of insect origin, the use of which is not known elsewhere in Mexico. Around Uruapan and Quiroga, both in the Tarascan country, beautiful highly coloured work is turned out. Even if commerce is tending to coarsen their designs, much of the tasteful traditional work is still to be had. Tarascan women carry their belongings in a deep painted wooden tray (*batea*), perched on top of the head, a habit which they share with the Tótonacs, of Papantla, Vera Cruz. The Tarascan *bateas* are, however, of superior workmanship.

Most of the garments worn by the Indians are, strange to say, of European origin. The weaving is usually done locally, and the garments vary in style and quality according to region and custom.

The most noticeable garment is the *sarape* of the man, which is in universal use, except in some of the hot coastal regions. The *sarape*, a garment of Spanish origin, is a rectangular piece of heavy woollen cloth with a hole in the centre through which the head is inserted, so that the garment forms a simple kind of cape, leaving the arms free. Most *sarapes* are worked in some sort of design, and at a *fiesta* in the *tierra fría* or *tierra templada* the unlimited variety of design lends considerable colour to the scene. The traditional domestic *sarape* is generally worked in sombre dignified colours, with browns, greys and blacks predominating, and sometimes with a touch of pink or red. Those offered for sale are frequently very garish, and few self-respecting Indians would wear the type of *sarapes* that are bought by the non-Indian public. There are so many *sarape*-weaving centres in Mexico that it would be pointless to enumerate them. I will merely add that some of the finest examples come from the Zápotec region of Oaxaca, where

the village of Teotitlán del Valle has a particular reputation for them.

In the nearby Mixtec part of the State of Oaxaca, very fine larger and heavier cloths, called *ponchos*, are woven, and used as bed-covers instead of as garments.

Don Roberto Weitlaner and others who have at heart the welfare of the lowly Otomi Indians of the States of Hidalgo and Mexico, have recently awakened sufficient public interest in these people to establish an Otomi folk-art museum in the village of Actopan. It is hoped thus to keep before the public a folk art which is tending to decline, and indirectly to stimulate it.

One of the most interesting and typical Otomi products is a woollen bag in which to carry small things, worn slung over one shoulder. These *costales* generally have a black background, and are embroidered with traditional, rather stylised, designs in white or red. The material used to-day by the Otomis for these bags is inferior to that which they used to employ, but their designs are still of great interest. The nearest place to the Otomi country that I know, where such an article is woven, is in the highlands of Guatemala, where the Cakchiquel Indians of Sololá use a similar black-and-white *costal* for the same purpose.

In the Mexican State of Nayarit the Huicholes also produce small bags, but their colour schemes are brighter and less conservative, and their embroidery finer than that of either the Otomi or Cakchiquel *costales*.

Colourful and elaborate woollen belts or sashes are woven in various styles, and worn by Indians of many different races all over the country.

In the State of Oaxaca, particularly, the women wear a long soft shawl (*rebozo*), woven of dark blue cotton, with a rather ill-defined whitish pattern worked into it.

The most important truly Indian garment is the loose smock-like blouse of the women. It is variable in length and form, and is known as *huipil* or *quexquemiltl*, according to its character. The Tótonac and Chinantec versions of this garment are outstanding, but the art of weaving these blouses is generally of a high order.



Basketwork and reed- and grass-plaiting are activities which probably occupy as many people in Mexico as does popular pottery, and every market has large quantities of all sorts of articles in these materials, from baskets to hats, and from toys to mats (*petates*). The most solid, handsome and luxurious baskets come from the Toluca region in the State of Mexico.

Most country people all over Mexico wear straw hats, and they are naturally of great variety. Some Indian groups, such as the Huicholes of Nayarit, and the Chamulas of Chiapas, can be recognised at once by the form of straw hat they wear. Travelling through the Mixtec area of Oaxaca, one gets the impression that the local people do little else but make hats, for it is common to see them deftly plaiting hats as they walk along the road from one village to another. That they work fast is inferred by the fact that some will be wearing three or four straw hats one on top of the other, whilst they are in process of making the next. The neighbouring Zapotecs and Mijes insist on wearing felt hats. This at least helps one to recognise the different races in the State of Oaxaca.

The *ex-votos* or *retablos* referred to above are essentially a form of folk art even if they are an almost universal adjunct of Catholicism. Usually in the form of a picture painted on tin-plate, and with an appropriate, if somewhat illiterate, inscription, they are offerings to the Almighty or to a saint, placed in a church by a parishioner who has some particular reason to feel grateful to Divine Providence. The imagination of the artist runs wild, and some of the *retablos* are child-like daubs devoid of perspective. They abound in the more humble churches, where perhaps the average parishioner is more pious than in the towns. I recall that the little Indian church of Tlacoahuaya, in Oaxaca, is full of them.

An alternative type of *ex-voto* is a small silver object, usually representing a human figure, a limb, or a heart; these are placed in some part of a church as an acknowledgment of lesser favours from on high. They have been turned out and sold to the pious by local craftsmen in great numbers since the earliest Colonial times.

Finally, there is a technique of picture-making involving

the use of microscopic multicoloured straws, known as *trabajo de popote*. The possibilities of this form of art are perhaps not very great, but the results obtained with the material are better than one would imagine. Patience is evidently a more precious quality here than artistic inspiration!

This short review cannot pretend to list all the multiple forms of folk art which are practised in Mexico—in fact it only covers those aspects of it with which I have come in contact in the course of my travels. There are no doubt many interesting forms peculiar to the northern part of the country, whether made by the rather backward Indian communities there, or by the general population. Also, I have little knowledge of the remote State of Chiapas, in the south-east, which is also doubtless highly productive in this respect.

### *Modern Art*

Modern Mexican painting has made its mark in the artistic world. In at least two respects it is basically different from contemporary painting elsewhere, and has certain qualities that are difficult to understand without a grasp of political and social developments in Mexico. This remarkable characteristic dates only from the end of the last war, or more accurately from the end of the violent part of the Mexican Revolution.

A few lines will suffice to cover the period from Independence to the year 1919. From the dawn of the last century until around 1850 there was no painting of merit in Mexico. From then on, academic subjects such as portraits, battle-scenes, and still-lives were painted, but they were not of outstanding quality. The ups and downs of the country's political fortunes influenced current tastes; the Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian endeavoured to foster an artificial vogue for art in the contemporary European style, but at the end of his short unhappy reign, taste under Benito Juárez swung in the opposite direction, and this type of painting never really obtained a sound footing. During this period, only two or three Mexican painters are considered to have contributed much to art. Of these Jose

María Velazco was the best. He specialised in landscapes, and was a conscientious and honest artist who pandered little to the whims and foibles of his time.

Throughout the Porfirio Díaz regime artists, in keeping with the contemporary outlook, were sent to Europe to study. There they obtained a wider horizon, which doubtless prepared the later arrivals for the remarkable artistic revolution that lay ahead.

The Mexican Revolution, it can be said, left everyone slightly breathless. In particular, the thinking classes were in a state of some mental turmoil. It is consequently perhaps not surprising that around 1919, or a little later, an intellectual stormy petrel named David Alfaro Siqueiros, who had been studying art in Europe, conceived an original and ambitious plan for reforming painting in his country. Endowed with a strong political sense, he announced that painting should be used as an expression of political and social ideas, that the country's artists should organise themselves and contribute to the achievements of the Revolution by enlightening the people, or, to put it in a nutshell, by using their art for purposes of social propaganda. He fired Diego Rivera, who was also in Europe (or perhaps they mutually fired each other) with enthusiasm for this hitherto unheard-of idea. The new form of painting, abandoning what they considered to be the effete European tradition, was to derive inspiration from the so-long neglected indigenous Mexican background, which in turn would have patriotic repercussions in knitting the country together, and go hand in hand with revolutionary aspirations for regenerating the Indians and the *mestizo* peons.

From then until the present day, leading Mexican painting has indeed followed these lines. Art has, with the blessing of the Government, become a means to an end, an instrument of social propaganda, and is thus in strong contrast with the more general idea of "art for art's sake". The more poignant paintings have a social moral to convey, a social abuse to expose, or a social reform to encourage, and their composition, in comparison with conservative academic themes, is of necessity tumultuous, disquieting, crowded and alive. The treatment has to be vigorous and compelling. Symbolism, innuendo and

satire abound in a kaleidoscopic setting of death, corruption, bureaucracy, the oppressed masses, agriculture, industry, literacy and illiteracy, dishonest opulence and honest penury.

The other basic difference from the more generally accepted forms of painting is the medium, which in this case means the size of the compositions. The medium for this kind of work is the mural fresco painted on walls of public buildings and educational establishments. Apart from the obvious efficacy of this medium for its object, it is noteworthy that two earlier precedents in Mexico are really being followed—the Indians of the pre-Hispanic period adorned the walls of their religious monuments either with paintings or with sculptured pictures, and later, in seventeenth century Colonial Mexico, a taste developed for colossal religious oil paintings on the walls of monastery and convent cloisters.

Of the exponents of this specialised form of painting, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco are undoubtedly the most prominent, brilliant and prolific. Siqueiros, the main original force behind the movement, has sunk into the background as an active painter, for in the course of time he has become more closely associated with labour organisation and with politics generally than with his own art. A fiery, impetuous character, he has more than once had to leave Mexico City for political reasons, and was on one occasion imprisoned on returning from the United States. Diego Rivera, brilliant artist though he undoubtedly is, is very much of a politician. Both he and Orozco took refuge in the United States when the conservatism of President Plutarco Calles frowned on their activity. Both became well-known there and each has since decorated several American public buildings in his own manner.

Siqueiros and Rivera have experimented with and developed new techniques of painting, and have adopted new forms of paint, in a successful endeavour to express themselves better in the exacting medium of the mural fresco, which demands from the artist great ability and confidence of execution.

Rivera, Mexico's most prolific artist, has painted many of his enormous frescoes, or series of panels, in the Mexican capital. There is also one in Cuernavaca (in Cortés's palace) and there are at least three noteworthy examples in the United

States. In Mexico City his work is to be seen at its best in the patio of the Palacio Nacional, in the Preparatory School of the National University, and in the Secretaría de Educación Pública.

Orozco's murals are almost unbelievably violent, passionate and fulminating. Some of the best examples of his work are in the Preparatory School in the Palacio de Justicia in Mexico City and in the library at Jiquilpan, Michoacán. His favourite themes are Revolution, and satirical attacks on whatever he considers to be the main social injustice of the day. He is represented by about four panels in the United States.

The work of Siqueiros is less easy to find in the capital, as his working career has so frequently been interrupted by political activities. There are Siqueiros panels, however, at the university and at the headquarters of the Syndicate of Electrical Workers.

There are many other painters of merit who have contributed to this school of painting, but they tend to be eclipsed by their spiritual head, Diego Rivera. Jean Charlot, Carlos Mérida and Roberto Montenegro are probably the most important of these lesser lights.

But all modern Mexican painting is not mural, and there is no lack of gifted artists who use the more conventional media, and who do not call for social reform in their paintings. The late Joaquín Clausell, who died in 1936, was a fine landscape painter; Miguel Covarrubias is a versatile artist with a great variety of subjects, including satirical ones; Gerardo Murillo, alias Dr. Atl, one of the earliest leaders in the artistic revolution, is predominantly an impressionist, though he has some murals to his credit; Ernesto García Cabral is a brilliant satirical cartoonist; and Jesus Reyes has in the last two years become well known, particularly in the United States, for the startling futuristic caricatures, mainly of cocks and horses, that he turns out with crayons on tissue paper.

Modern sculpture developed later than painting, and it has hardly been put to the same political uses. Probably Mexico's outstanding sculptor to-day is Ignacio Asúnsolo, a serious artist who has received several Government commissions. Another sculptor of merit is Mardonio Magaña, who is rather

exceptional in that he began work at the ripe age of sixty-two.

The heterodoxy, brilliance and power of Mexico's twentieth century painting could not fail to arouse the interest of foreign experts, and many Americans and others have attempted analyses of the technique and style of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, and the impulses behind their extraordinary work.

### *Music*

Musically speaking, Mexico is probably the most interesting of all Latin American countries, with the possible exception of Brazil.

The folk music varies from the intensely emotional songs of the primitive Seris of Sonora to the Hispano-Mexican cowboy ballads of the Central Plateau.

The latter are straightforward, in conventional western keys and simple harmonies, which hardly move from tonic and dominant. According to Mr. Noel Lindsay, to whom incidentally I am indebted for the use of his notes on Mexican music, the Seri songs, accompanied only by their equivalent of the tom-tom, are not capable of harmonisation according to European styles, but are not as inaccessible to our appreciation, as is, for example, most oriental music. They have, in fact, an unforgettable, haunting quality, and are a fitting elegy for a race, which, if not in process of extinction, is nowadays certainly a mere shadow of its former self.

The indigenous Aztec music, which was probably a legacy from the less barbarous nations whom the Aztecs followed, has been almost completely swamped by European influences. It survives to-day only in the interminably repeated little phrases that accompany the traditional dances. These are played on the *chirimiya* and *tamborcito* (the Indian equivalents of our pipe and tabor).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These are indigenous instruments. They should not be confused with two other native instruments which exist. The *teponaztli* is a large lateral drum, fashioned out of a section of a tree-trunk, and having a slit on the long side and the striking part at each end. This instrument is still used ritualistically in certain indigenous communities. The second instrument is also known as *chirimiya*, though it has nothing analogous to the *chirimiya* mentioned in the text. In 1944 Ingeniero Roberto Weitlaner came upon this hitherto unknown

The traditional dances themselves are in most cases hopelessly corrupt. The formal Spanish blank verse which is orated at the Chapala Christmas dance, for instance, is sheer gibberish, which has been passed on verbally from one generation to another, and never entrusted to writing; in the dance, Malinche is confused with the Virgin Mary, Moctezuma with Pontius Pilate, and Hernán Cortés with Christ, in a weird jumble of ideas relating both to the Conquest and to the life of our Lord. There is no reason to suppose that the music has not suffered similarly.

Between the extremes of such music and the sentimental cowboy ballads in quick waltz time there is a wide range of folk-music. As one approaches the east coast of the country, the rhythmic interest increases and the harmony becomes obviously that of the natural chords of the guitar.

Probably the most attractive forms of all Mexican folk music are the *huapangos* of the north-east of the country, and the *sones veracruzanos*. Both are exceedingly lively, the latter alternating a rapid common time with  $3/4$ , and the former crossing  $6/8$  with  $3/2$ .

Folk music in Mexico is a living thing, and masterpieces in these idioms are being composed all the time, sometimes anonymously, sometimes by known local musicians. Events are chronicled in ballads, often improvised on the spot, and known as *corridos*. Mexicans have a well-developed sense of wit, which comes to the fore in the words of most folk songs.

To the uninitiated the State of Jalisco seems to have a kind of hegemony in popular music over most of the Republic. There are many strolling bands of *mariachis*, whose strength lies in their voices, their *marimbas*<sup>1</sup> and their guitars. The majority of them appear to claim some sort of allegiance to the State of Jalisco, and in Jalisco itself the *mariachis* seem to excel.

With such a natural heritage, one might expect a large crop of serious musicians, but this has not been the case. In the

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wind-instrument in the village of Tlatlaya, in the State of Mexico, not far from the borders of Guerrero. Fully two metres long, and with a half calabash at one end, and the mouthpiece at the other, it is played by suction instead of by blowing!

<sup>1</sup> The *marimba* is a large, mainly wooden instrument, played by tapping the wooden keys with a small hammer, on the principle of the xylophone.

first place, symphonic musicians require the presence of a symphonic orchestra, and lack of resources made this impossible until Carlos Chavez succeeded in founding the Mexican Symphony Orchestra about eighteen years ago, with some thirty-five players, including even street fiddlers. This orchestra has now grown into an excellent ensemble of over a hundred musicians, with a four-month annual season of programmes of enterprise and interest. Mexico's musical debt to Chavez is incalculable. He himself is a highly original composer, who owes little to any outside influences, and expresses himself in a very direct, almost epigrammatic manner.

Silvestre Revueltas, who died a few years ago, was possibly more brilliant, but he endangered his capacity for expression by limiting himself to the procrustean folk style of the *mariachis*, and his works, though very attractive at first hearing, tend to be monotonous in bulk.

Older than either of these is Manuel Ponce, well known as the composer of the popular song *Estrellita*, but also the author of large-scale symphonic works. These show great skill, and an abundance of technical resource, but they are clearly of the conventional European classico-romantic school of the late nineteenth century, and are hardly really Mexican.

Another interesting figure is Julián Carrillo, also an older man. He is a theorist with a tonal system even more formidable than that of Schönberg, involving micro-tones. His works are hardly ever heard, because the average musician is incapable of playing them.

There is a younger generation of competent Mexican musicians, of whom little can be said except that they show promise and that the influence on them of Chavez is logically all-pervading. Their music, which lacks Chavez's sureness of effect, has not yet found a voice of its own. What immediately strikes one, however, is the immense superiority of Mexican symphonic music over anything now being produced farther south, with the exception of the compositions of the Brazilian Villalobos, for most of the South American composers apparently still model themselves on Liszt.

The Cathedral of Morelia, in the State of Michoacán, is outstanding in the Republic for the excellence of its church



music. Maestro Miguel Bernal Jiménez maintains the best traditions of Catholic church music there. He is also a composer of no mean talent, having been responsible for the only Mexican opera in existence, called *Tata Vasco*.

### *Coins*

The coinage of a country may be said to reflect in some way the art of that country, even if the connection be not a direct one.

Before the Conquest, the inhabitants of Mexico used no coins. The barter system was prevalent, and in some areas thin copper objects like the head of an edging-tool were in use.

Whilst Mexico was a colony, its coins were naturally Spanish in design, and, to begin with, money minted in Spain was in circulation. But Mexico's silver resources were such that her coins were soon struck within the colony. The designs were still sent from Spain, and many of the issues differed only very slightly from those of the mother country. On the whole, Mexican coins of the Colonial period were fine, dignified examples of money, and cover eleven reigns, from Carlos I and Juana (who were on the throne from 1516 to 1556) to Fernando VII, whose coins were in use when the Mexican republic was born in 1810. After Independence, however, the new-born republic naturally designed its own coins, and struck them exclusively with its own metals. The Colonial tradition persisted, and when conditions have been normal, the Republic has produced money pleasing to both the public and the numismatist. The Mexican Eagle emblem has been the dominant motif throughout the Republic's existence. Coins of the short-lived "Emperor" Iturbide and of the other Emperor, Maximilian of Hapsburg, are exceptions, and are nowadays scarce and difficult to obtain.

The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, produced a spate of coins which, for various reasons, are of considerable interest. Few people have studied them, and the total number of Revolutionary issues is not known for certain. Señor J.

Sánchez Garza, one of the best informed people on this subject, mentions a total of 205 Revolutionary coins, but previously unknown coins come to light from time to time. These issues are rarely beautiful, but the conditions in which they were struck militated against careful work or artistic designing. They were coined not only by the Federal Government but by various State Governors and by generals, both "Loyalist" and "Insurrectionist", in different parts of the country during the years of strife. Owing to the very fluid situation that prevailed in some areas, many issues were extremely small, and the work of engraving slap-dash. When the troops of one or another faction fell back, the money coined by authority of the retreating general sometimes had to be hidden or jettisoned by the owner for fear of intolerant reprisals on the part of the advancing faction! Hence the extreme rarity of some of these pieces. On the other hand coins minted in a region which remained relatively stable during the Revolution are still common, and issues from the State of Oaxaca, for example, are to be found in some numbers at the Lagunilla Market on Sunday mornings, and in many of the antique shops of the capital.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TAILPIECE: MEXICO AND THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

WHEN I first thought of writing a book about Mexico, I realised that the idea was not very original. This could be seen even from a superficial glance at the contents of any good bookshop in Mexico City, for the output of writings, in the English language alone, on this fascinating country has been considerable, particularly in the last decade.

Later on I began to collate and to review the whole parade of Mexican books in English down the years, and the results were rather remarkable.

I found ninety-two British authors (and an even greater number of Americans) who have written non-fiction books about the country or about some particular aspect of it.

Of these ninety-two Britons, nine wrote their impressions before 1800, and forty-five in the last century, leaving thirty-eight for the last forty-five years. Classifying them according to subject, I found that sixty-five wrote what may be termed general descriptive books, eighteen produced studies of special subjects (of which archæology is the most important), and nine wrote about Mexican history—either in general, or of some particular historical character or period. I do not guarantee that my list is complete and it is quite possible that still other books on Mexico by British authors are in existence.

The type of writing reflects faithfully the trends of the different periods.

The first period, which one might well call the Argonaut Era, is characterised by the narratives of sailors and adventurers in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The accounts of Mexico, then a Spanish colony, are usually sandwiched into descriptions of other parts of the American continent.

Soon after Mexico's Declaration of Independence, in 1810, and on the establishment of Anglo-Mexican diplomatic relations, English visitors to the country became more

numerous, and from the 1820s onwards, books began to come quick and fast. Mexico was naturally little known in most parts of Europe, and conditions of travel in such a remote region lent glamour to a visit, which struck nearly all these writers as a somewhat grand and glorious adventure. Several soldiers and sailors thus recorded their impressions. There are also a few accounts from businessmen involved in some way or another in the new British mining interests in the Republic, and several books contain detailed accounts of the mines at such places as Real del Monte, Zacatecas and Guanajuato.

These works are for the most part neither profound nor particularly elegant in style; they record with varying degrees of humour and accuracy the rigours of the trip, and contain topographical descriptions, observations on conditions in the country and comments on the social institutions and moral usages of its inhabitants. They are interesting in that they enable one to compare present conditions and development with those that ruled a century and more ago. Madame Calderón de la Barca's book *Life in Mexico*, written in 1843, is by far the best-known of all the works of this period, because, apart from being a keen and intelligent observer, she wrote in a witty and entertaining style. Madame Calderón de la Barca's maiden name was Fanny Erskine Inglis, for she was a Scots-woman from Edinburgh, married to a Spanish diplomat.

One notes a change in the form of writing towards the end of the last century. Instead of general, more or less superficial, description, more specialised writing began to appear. Englishmen interested in archæology and kindred subjects wrote seriously and analytically of their studies in Mexico, which they have continued to do up to the present time.

There was something of a hiatus towards the end of the Mexican Revolution, but when the tumult and the shouting had died, British visitors with an urge to write reappeared on the scene. I have found ten new British authors of "Mexicana" who wrote in the 1920's, and a further ten in the last decade.

At the end of this chapter is a list of these writers and their works, in chronological order. All types of people are included, from diplomats to seamen, from scholars to service men, and

from businessmen to students of sociology. Although new books are still being written, fresh angles of approach are found, and the subject of Mexico is still far from being exhausted.

Of the Americans who have written about the country, I have nothing like a complete list, for American authors in considerable numbers have been writing on specialised Mexican subjects for some years. This tendency has been accentuated since the formulation of the Good Neighbour policy, when relations between the two countries were very much strengthened. Moreover, during the war years, innumerable Americans who, in normal times, would have gone to Europe or elsewhere for their holidays, went to Mexico, and many of them in their enthusiasm added their contributions to existing bibliography.

I have, however, come across no less than 137 American writers on Mexico, exclusive of the authors of the now very numerous papers on scientific and archæological subjects. Of these 137, only twenty-five wrote before 1900 (compared with fifty-four Englishmen) but since then the Americans have outstripped us, and I have found fifty-five different books about Mexico written since 1935! A rough classification shows that seventy-five Americans have written general descriptions, thirty-nine have dealt with special subjects (above all with political and social questions) and twenty-three have produced historical treatises.

Of these books by Americans, I will merely mention the following, which are generally considered to be outstanding:

Title	Author	Date first published
<i>Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan</i> (2 volumes)	J. L. Stephens	1841
<i>Incidents of Travel in Yucatan</i> (2 volumes)	..	1843
<i>Mexico As It Was and As It Is</i>	Brantz Mayer	1841-42
<i>History of the Conquest of Mexico</i> (3 volumes)	W. Prescott	1843

(This is the famous classic, from which most of us have derived any initial knowledge we may have of the subject.)

<i>Unknown Mexico</i> (2 volumes)	C. Lumholtz	1902
<i>Viva Mexico</i>	C. M. Flandrau	1908
<i>A Study of Maya Art</i>	H. J. Spinden	1913
<i>Ancient Civilisations of Mexico and Central America</i>	..	1928

Title	Author	Date first published
<i>Guide to Mexico</i>	T. Philip Terry	1920 and many subsequent editions.
<i>Mexico and Its Heritage</i>	E. Gruening	1928
<i>Idols Behind Altars</i>	Anita Brenner	1929
<i>Your Mexican Holiday</i>	"	1932
<i>The Wind That Swept Mexico</i>	Anita Brenner and G. Leighton	1943
<i>Tepoztlan—a Mexican Village</i>	Robert Redfield	1930
<i>Folk Culture of Yucatan</i>	"	1934 (?)
<i>Little Mexico</i>	William Spratling	1932
<i>Off to Mexico</i>	L. and A. L. Moats	1935
<i>The Conquest of Yucatan</i>	Franz Blom	1936
<i>Mitla, the Town of Souls</i>	Elsie C. Parsons	1936
<i>The Ejido—Mexico's Way Out</i>	Dr. E. M. Simpson	1937
<i>A History of Mexico</i>	H. B. Parkes	1938
<i>Aztecs of Mexico</i>	G. C. Vaillant	1941
<i>Timeless Mexico</i>	Hudson Strode	1944

Several writers of other nationalities have either written books on Mexico in English, or have had their works translated into our language. Baron von Humboldt's famous *Essay on New Spain* is perhaps the earliest and best-known work of this type, and late in the last century several French men of letters were active, and English translations of their writings are in existence. Of books written in English by Europeans, the following deserve particular mention:

*Battlefield of the Gods*, by Pal Kelemen (Hungarian), published in London in 1937; and

*Art in Ancient Mexico*, by G. and M. T. Médioni (French), published in New York in 1941.

A dozen or so American, British and other novelists, entranced by the Mexican scene, have chosen the country as the background for their novels. The pioneer in this was, I believe, Rider Haggard, with his *Montezuma's Daughter*; since then D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Hergesheimer, Ralph Bates and others have felt the same urge. Early in 1945 a fine historical novel entitled *Captain from Castille* came from the American writer, Samuel Shellabarger.

I think I have said enough in this book to give the impression that Mexico is a photogenic country *par excellence*. The word "photogenic" is a newly coined one, but before photography was invented the meaning that "photogenic" conveys was felt by

numerous foreign painters, among whom are several Englishmen. George Ackermann, D. G. Egerton, L. Underwood, and A. V. Coverley-Price, among others, did fine work, the preferred subjects being landscapes and things Indian. More lately, Valetta Swann de Malinowski has carried on the tradition by capturing on her canvases some of the visual attractions of Oaxaca, and more particularly of its Indians, which she seems to understand and analyse two-dimensionally with great insight.

Yet another form of cultural interest in the country is the translation from Spanish of important documents concerning Mexico. Several Englishmen rendered these manuscripts into English for the first time. The pioneer of these was Richard Eden, who translated *The Decades of Martyr de Anghiera* as long ago as 1555; since then such names as Captain J. Stevens (*Antonio de Herrera*), T. Townsend (*Solís*), Thomas Nicholas (*Gómara*), C. Cullen (*Clavigero*), G. A. Thompson (*Alcedo*), M. Keatinge, J. I. Lockhart and A. P. Maudslay (*Bernal Díaz*) and J. Bayard Morris (*the letters of Cortés*) have become familiar to students and scholars who have had occasion to delve into these records of the past.

A comparison of the above bibliographical data of Britons and Americans respectively discloses plainly what must be accepted as a sign of the times. Owing to the Oil Expropriation of 1938, and to other factors, of which the war is not the least important, our present ties with Mexico are considerably less close than they were, whilst American activity, logically, is strongly intensified in almost every sphere.

Whatever may be the future of Anglo-Mexican trade and economic relations, it is to be hoped that British scientific collaboration with Mexico will be intensified, and that in future Englishmen will be able to co-operate with the Americans and with the Mexicans themselves in research work, and direct their endeavours to the country's advancement, whether in the realm of agriculture, mining or some less strictly utilitarian activity such as disclosing her remote past through archæology.

It is also to be hoped that with the rapid shortening of distances that is now coming about, many Englishmen will be able to visit the country for the first time, enjoy her friendliness

and hospitality, and experience her other attractions of climate and scenery. Even the most brilliant book cannot do much more than help, somewhat negatively, to eradicate misconceptions. It cannot call into being the sympathy or understanding born of personal contact. And this sympathy, or understanding, is a thing the world now needs, perhaps more than ever before.



# APPENDIX

## Works on Mexico (other than novels) by British authors. In chronological order.

No.	Date of first publication	Title	Author
1	1569	<i>A True Declaration of the Troublesome Voyage of John Hawkins . . .</i>	John Hawkins.
2	1589	<i>Accounts of Mexico in Principle Navigations Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation</i>	Richard Hakluyt.
3	1648	<i>A New Survey of the West Indies</i>	Thomas Gage.
4	1671	<i>Reference to Mexico in America</i>	John Ogilby.
5	1677	<i>Voyage to the Isthmus of America</i>	Lionel Wafer.
6	1712	<i>A Cruising Voyage Around the World</i>	Woodes Rogers.
7	1726	<i>A History of the Voyages and Travels of Captain Uring</i>	Captain N. Uring.
8	1748	<i>A Voyage Around the World</i>	George Anson.
9	1777	<i>Reference to Mexico in History of America</i>	Dr. William Robertson.
10	1818	<i>References in Spanish America</i> (2 volumes)	Captain R. H. Bonnycastle, R.E.
11	1821	<i>Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution</i> (2 volumes)	W. D. Robinson.
12	1824	<i>Six Months' Residence and Travels in Mexico, etc.</i>	W. Bullock.
13	1824	<i>History of Mexico</i>	Nicholas Mill.
14	1824	<i>Extracts from Journal written on the coasts of Chile, Peru and Mexico</i> (2 volumes)	Captain Basil Hall, R.N.
15	1825	<i>The Present Operations and Future Prospects of the Mexican Mine Association</i> (published from a letter)	Sir William Rawson.
16	1825	<i>The Actual State of the Mexican Mines</i> (published from a letter)	Sir William Adams.
17	1827	<i>Sketchbook . . .</i>	Captain G. F. Lyon,
	1828	<i>Journal of a Residence and Tour in the Republic of Mexico</i> (2 volumes)	R.N., F.R.S. ..
18	1828	<i>Mexico</i>	H. G. Ward (later Sir Henry Ward).
19	1828	<i>Illustrations of Mexico</i>	Mrs. H. G. Ward (later Lady Ward).
20	1828	<i>Mexican Illustrations</i>	Mark Beaufoy.
21	1829	<i>Travels in the Interior of Mexico, 1825-8</i>	Lieutenant R. W. H. Hardy, R.N.
22	1830-48	<i>Antiquities of Mexico</i> (9 volumes)	Lord Kingsborough.
23	1831	<i>Mexico and Guatemala</i> (2 volumes)	Josiah Conder.
24	1834	<i>Narrative of a Tour in North America, including Mexico . . .</i> (2 volumes)	H. Tudor.

No.	Date of first publication	Title	Author
25	1836	<i>Rambler in Mexico, 1824</i>	C. G. Latrobe.
26	1843	<i>Life in Mexico . . .</i>	Madame Calderón de la Barca.
27	1844	<i>Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan</i>	F. Catherwood.
(This artist accompanied the American, J. L. Stephens, whose works I have mentioned elsewhere.)			
28	1847	<i>Travels in Mexico, 1843-4</i>	A. M. Gilliam.
29	1847	<i>Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains</i>	Lieutenant G. H. Ruxton, 89th regiment.
30	1848	<i>Conquerors of the New World</i>	Sir Arthur Helps.
	1853-61	<i>Spanish Conquest in America</i>	"
31	1850	<i>The Rifle Rangers, or the Adventures of an Officer in Southern Mexico</i>	Captain Mayne Reid.
32	1851	<i>A Trip to Mexico</i>	"A. Barrister." (A. C. Forbes).
33	1851	<i>Notes of an Excursion to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec</i>	R. Dale.
34	1851	<i>Pictures of Life in Mexico (2 volumes)</i>	R. H. Mason.
35	1851	<i>Travels in the United States, etc.</i>	Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley.
36	1853	<i>A Visit to Mexico (2 volumes)</i>	W. P. Robertson.
37	1854	<i>History of Yucatan</i>	C. St. John Fancourt.
38	1859	<i>Seven Years Travel in Central America</i>	Julius Froebel.
39	1859	<i>Mexico, Landscapes and Sketches</i>	C. Sartorius.
40	1860	<i>Travels in Peru and Mexico</i>	S. S. Hill.
41	1861	<i>Anahuac</i>	Sir Edward B. Tylor.
42	1862	<i>Notes on Mexico in 1861-2</i>	C. Lemprière.
43	1863	<i>Travels in Mexico, South America, etc. (2 volumes)</i>	G. T. Vigne.
44	1866	<i>Across Mexico in 1864-5</i>	W. H. Bullock.
45	1868	<i>With the French in Mexico</i>	J. F. Elton.
46	1872	<i>The Fall of Maximilian, late Emperor of Mexico</i>	W. Harris Chynoweth.
47	1874	<i>A Peep at Mexico</i>	J. L. Geiger.
48	1880	<i>A Trip to Mexico</i>	H. C. R. Becher.
	(Toronto)		
49	1883	<i>Mexico Today</i>	T. U. Brocklehurst.
50	1883	<i>First Three English Books on America</i>	Edward Arber.
51	1889-1902	<i>Archæology (1 volume of text, 4 volumes of plates)</i>	A. P. Maudslay.
52	1891	<i>Mexico, 1891</i>	Susan Hale.
53	1892	<i>Mexico, its Progress and Commercial Possibilities</i>	E. J. Howell.
54	1892	<i>Through the Land of the Aztecs</i>	"A Gringo."
55	1906	<i>Porfirio Diaz, Seven Times President of Mexico</i>	Mrs. Alec Tweedie.
	1911	<i>Mexico as I saw It</i>	"
	1917	<i>Mexico from Diaz to the Kaiser</i>	"
56	1907	<i>Mexico in the 20th Century (2 volumes)</i>	P. Martin, F.R.G.S.
	1911	<i>Maximilian in Mexico</i>	"

No.	Date of first publication	Title	Author
57	1908	<i>Through Southern Mexico</i>	Dr. H. Gadow.
	1930	<i>Jorullo</i>	"
58	1909	<i>The American Egypt: a Record of Travel in Yucatan</i>	C. Arnold and F. J. C. Frost.
59	1910	<i>Directory of Mines and Estates of Mexico</i>	P. G. Holms.
60	1910	<i>Beyond the Mexican Sierras</i>	Dillon Wallace.
61	1910	<i>The Ruins of Mexico</i>	C. G. Rickards.
	1910-39	Thirteen Archæological Monographs	"
62	1911	<i>Impressions of Mexico with Brush and Pen</i>	Mary Barton.
63	1912	<i>Wanderings in Mexico</i>	Wallis Gillpatrick.
64	1912	<i>The Civilisation of Ancient Mexico</i>	L. Spence.
	1913	<i>The Myths of Mexico and Peru</i>	"
	1918	<i>Mexico of the Mexicans</i>	"
	1923	<i>The Gods of Mexico</i>	"
	(?)	<i>The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico</i>	"
65	1914	<i>Modern Mexico</i>	R. J. MacHugh.
66	1914 (?)	<i>Book of Sketches in Mexico</i>	W. Buchanan.
67	1914	<i>The Real Mexico</i>	Hamilton H. Fyfe.
68	1914	<i>Mexico, the Land of Unrest</i>	H. Baerlein.
69	1914	<i>Mexican Archæology</i>	T. A. Joyce, O.B.E.
	1927	<i>Maya and Mexican Art</i>	"
70	1921	<i>Mexico on the Verge</i>	Dr. E. J. Dillon.
71	1921	<i>The Quick Step of an Emperor—Maximilian of Mexico</i>	G. P. Messervy.
72	1922	<i>Reference in My American Diary</i>	Clare Sheridan.
73	1923	<i>Ernesto Garcia Cabral, a Mexican Cartoonist</i>	G. R. G. Conway.
	1927	<i>An Englishman and the Mexican Inquisition</i>	"
	1928	<i>The Rare Travailes of Job Hortop</i>	"
	1928	<i>Hernando Alonso, a Jewish Conquistador with Cortes in Mexico</i>	"
	1939	<i>Last Will and Testament of Hernan Cortes</i>	"
	1939	<i>Juan Francisco Naranjo and the Old University of Mexico</i>	"
	1942	<i>La Noche Triste</i>	"
	1945	<i>Francisco Cervantes Salazar and Eugenio Manzanias</i>	"
74	1924	<i>In an Unknown Land</i>	T. Gann.
	1936	<i>Mexico from the Earliest Times to the Conquest</i>	"
75	1924(?)	<i>Myths of pre-Columbian America</i>	Donald Mackenzie.
76	1924	<i>In Quest of El Dorado</i>	Stephen Graham.
77	1925	<i>Mexico in Revolution</i>	Charlotte Cameron.
78	1927	<i>Modern Mexico and its Problems</i>	J. W. Brown.
79	1928	<i>Red Mexico</i>	Captain F. McCullagh.
80	1934	<i>Conquest of the Maya</i>	L. J. Mitchell.
81	1934	<i>Beyond the Mexique Bay</i>	Aldous Huxley.
82	1934	<i>Archæological Tours from Mexico City</i>	Robert Marett.
	1939	<i>An Eye-Witness of Mexico</i>	"
83	1935	<i>Mexico Before Cortes and numerous archæological monographs</i>	Dr. J. Eric Thompson.

No.	Date of first Publication	Title	Author
84	1935	<i>Religion in the Republic of Mexico</i>	Kenneth Grubb and G. Baez Camargo.
85	1935	<i>The Mexican Adventure</i>	Daniel Dawson.
86	1938	<i>Codex Mendoza</i>	James Cooper Clark.
87	1938	<i>The Chinantec</i>	Bernard Bevan.
	1938	Handling of Colonial Architecture in <i>History of Spanish Architecture</i>	"
88	1938	<i>The Lawless Roads</i>	Graham Green.
89	1938	<i>Ancient Monuments of Mexico</i>	Rodney Gallop
	1938	<i>Mexican Mosaic</i> and numerous articles	"
90	1940	<i>Mexico, a New Spain with Old Friends</i>	J. B. Trend.
91	1942	Reference to Mexico in <i>Britain and Latin American Independence</i>	Professor C. K. Allen.
92	1945	<i>Dawn Breaks in Mexico</i>	Lieutenant Colonel J. B. Osbaldeston Mitford.

Since this list was compiled, Colonel H. Montgomery Hyde has published *Mexican Empire* (April 1946).

# INDEX

- Abarrotes*, 28-9  
 Acapulco (Guerrero), 69, 142  
 Ackerman, G., 162  
*Acocote*, 123  
 Acolman, Church of San Agustín, 136  
 Acosta, Jorge, 76  
 Actopan, Church, 136  
 Adams, Sir William, 164  
*Agapanthus (agapanda)*, 26  
*Agaves*, 122-4  
*Agava fourcroydes*, 123  
 Agouti, 117  
*Agua miel*, 123  
 Agustín, Church of San, 140  
*Ahuehuele*, 25  
 Ajusco, Sierra de, 19  
 Alabaster, 82  
*Alacranes*, 121  
 Albarradas, Santa Catarina (Oaxaca), 56  
     Santo Domingo (Oaxaca), 44, 54  
     San Lorenzo (Oaxaca), 56  
     Santa María (Oaxaca), 54  
     San Miguel (Oaxaca), 56  
 Allen, Professor C. K., 169  
*Allouatta mexicana*, 118  
 Alvarado, Pedro de, 51  
 Alvarado, Puerto (Vera Cruz), 11  
 Amaro Dominguez, General Joaquin, 7, 32  
*Amazona autumnalis*, 126  
*Amazona oratrix*, 126  
*Amblystoma tigrinum*, 118  
 Anahuac, 17  
 Andrés, San, island, 95  
 Anson, George, 164  
 Anza, M., 25  
 Apache Indians (U.S.A.), 97  
*Aratinga canicularis*, 126  
 Arber, Edward, 165  
 Archaic civilisations, 80, 81-2  
*Arcones*, 142  
 Armadillo, 117  
 Arnold, C., 166  
 Arrowheads, 81  
 Asúnsolo, Ignacio, 152  
*Ateles vellerosus*, 118  
 Atl, Dr., 152  
 Augustinian order, 135-6  
 Avila Camacho, President Manuel, 24  
 Axe-heads, 81  
*Axolotl*, 118  
 Aztec civilisation, Indians and language, 4, 8-9, 74, 76, 82, 85, 90-1, 98, 118, 122, 153  
*Azulejos*, 138, 145  
 "BABY-FACE" figurines, 82  
 Badianus manuscript, 116  
 Baerlein, H., 166  
 Baez Camargo, G., 167  
 Baja California, 70  
 Balbuena airport, 36-7  
 Banks, 34  
*Barbacoa* (barbecue), 129  
 Baroque styles, 138  
 Barton, Mary, 166  
 Basket-work, 148  
*Bateas*, 146  
 Bats, 118  
 Bates, Ralph, 161  
 Beaufoy, Mark, 164  
 Becher, H. C. R., 165  
 Bellas Artes, Palacio de, 32  
 Benítez, José, 138  
 Bernal Jimenez, Miguel, 156  
 Bevan, Bernard, 40, 99, 167  
 Blom, Franz, 76, 161  
 Bonnycastle, Captain R. H., 164  
*Borrero silvestre*, 117  
*Borrendo*, 117  
 Botanical Institute, 116  
 Bougainvillaea (bugambilia), 26  
 Bravo, Helia, 114  
 Brenner, Anita, 94, 161  
 British colony, 33-4  
     Honduras, 92  
 Brocklehurst, T. U., 165  
 Brown, J. W., 166  
 Buchanan, W., 166  
 Bull-fighting, 30-1  
 Bullock, T. W. I., 40 *et seq.*  
 Bullock, W., 164  
 Bullock, W. H., 165  
 Butterflies, 121  
*Cacao*, 131  
*Cacomixtle*, 125  
 Cacti, 124  
*Caguama*, 62  
*Caimito*, 130  
 Cajonos, San Francisco (Oaxaca), 52  
     San Mateo (Oaxaca), 46  
 Cakchiquel Indians, 147

- Calderón de la Barca, Madame, 12,  
159, 165  
Calendars, 93  
Californian style, 23  
Calixtlahuaca (Mexico), 87  
Calles, President Plutarco, 151  
Camargo, Pablo, 59 *et seq.*  
Cameron, Charlotte, 166  
Camotlán, 52  
Candelabrum, funerary, 145  
Candlewood, 37  
*Canis caribbaeus*, 127  
*Cántaros*, 144  
Cárdenas, President Lazaro, 7, 71,  
104  
Carmelite order, 137  
Carmen, Isla del (Campeche), 69  
Carrillo, Julian, 155  
Casas Grandes pottery, 85  
Caso, Alfonso, 76  
*Catharista urubu*, 119  
*Cathartes aura*, 119  
Catherwood, F., 165  
Cattle, 128  
Cecilia, Santa, pyramid, 87  
Celaya, Church of El Carmen,  
(Guanajuato), 140  
*Cenzontle*, 126  
Chamula Indians, 148  
Chapala dances, 154  
*Chapopote*, 54  
Chapultepec, Acto de, 24  
Chapultepec, Bosque, Castle and  
Lomas, 23-5  
Charlot, Jean, 152  
*Charros*, 25, 31, 128-9  
Chavez, Carlos, 155  
Chichen Itzá (Yucatan), 87, 92, 94  
*Chichi*, 127  
Chichimec civilisation, 4, 90  
Chicomcoat, 122  
*Chicozapote*, 130  
Chihuahua dog, 118, 126  
*Chilis*, 129-30  
*Chinampas*, 18  
Chinantec Indians, 99, 147  
*Chirimiya*, 153  
*Chirimoya*, 130  
Chocolate, 130-1  
Cholula (Puebla), Pyramid, 87, 137  
churches, 136, 137  
Chueca, Punta (Sonora), 62  
Churrigueresque style, 138, 139  
Chynoweth, W. Harris, 165  
Ciuteotl, 122  
Clark, J. C., 167  
Clausell, Joaquin, 152  
Climate, 3-5  
Coatimondi, 117  
Coatlinchán, village and idol, 89  
*Coche de Monte*, 125  
Cocoa (*see cacao*)  
Codices, 133-4  
Coins, 156-7  
Coixtlahuaca (Mexico), 136  
Colchas, S. Juan de las (Michoacan),  
71  
*Colear*, 31  
Colima culture, 77, 79, 84, 102  
Comito, Pedro, 64  
Conder, J., 164  
Conway, G. R. G., 166  
Copán (Honduras), 92, 93  
Copilco (D. F.), 4  
Cora Indians, 103, 145  
Córdoba (Vera Cruz), 121  
*Corridos* (*see* Bull-fights)  
*Corridos*, 154  
Cortés, Hernan, 5, 17-8, 91, 134  
*Costales*, 147  
*Cotorra*, 121  
Covarrubias, Miguel, 76, 129, 152  
Coverley-Price, A., 162  
Coyoacán (D. F.), 23  
*Coyote*, 117  
Coyotepec (Oaxaca), 144-5  
*Crax* (genus of birds), 120  
Crime, 15, 29  
*Criollos*, 7  
Crosses, silver, 48, 50, 142  
Cruz, Martinus de la, 116  
Cuernavaca or Cuauhnahuac (More-  
los), 70, 91, 135, 151  
Cuicuilco pyramid, 80, 87  
Cullen, C., 162  
Curassow, 120  
  
DALE, R., 165  
*Danta*, 117  
*Danza del Venado* (deer dance), 146  
Dawson, Daniel, 167  
Deer, 117  
Diaz, President Porfirio, 6  
Diaz del Castillo, Bernal, 17, 91  
Diet, 129-30  
Dillon, Dr. E. J., 166  
Dobrowolski, Major and Mrs., 40  
*et seq.*  
Dogs, "Colima", 84-5  
Mexican breeds, 118, 125, 127  
Dominican order, 135-7  
  
ECATEPEC, Church of San Francisco,  
138-9  
Eden, Richard, 162  
Egerton, D. G., 162

- Elliott, T. G., 118  
*Elote*, 129  
 Elton, J. F., 165  
*Escorpión*, 121  
 Esteban, San, island, 59  
*Estofado* work, 141  
*Ex-votos*, 148  
  
 FACE-PAINTING (Seris), 66  
 Fancourt, C. St. J., 165  
 Feather-work, 85  
*Flamboyán*, 27  
 Flandrau, C. M., 160  
 Flints, 81  
 Flores (Guatemala), 95  
 Forbes, A. C., 165  
 Foxes, 125  
 Franciscan order, 135-6  
 Frangipani-tree, 26  
*Frijoles*, 129  
 Froebel, J., 165  
 Frost, F. J. C., 166  
 Fyfe, H., 166  
  
*Gachupines*, 29  
 Gadow, Dr. H., 166  
 Gage, T., 164  
 Gallop, R., 167  
 Gamio, Manuel, 104  
 Gann, T., 166  
 García Cabral, Ernesto, 152  
 García Payon, Jose, 76  
*Gato montes, gato de monte*, 117, 125  
 Gaumer, G., 127  
 Geiger, J. L., 165  
 Geografía y Estadística, Sociedad de, 101  
 Gila monster, 121  
 Gilliam, A. M., 165  
 Gillpatrick, W., 166  
 Gini (Italian scientist), 60  
 Gladioli, 26  
 "Glasgow Geography", 25  
 Graham, S., 166  
 Green, Graham, 167  
 Grubb, K., 167  
 Gruening, E., 161  
 Guadalupe, Nuestra Señora de, 145  
 Guadalupe, Sierra de, 19  
*Guajolote*, 120  
 Guan, 120  
 Guanajuato mines, 159  
 Guatemala, 78, 92  
*Guatusa*, 117  
 Guaymas (Sonora), 58  
 Guerrero cultures, 82  
 Gukumats, 91  
*Gusanos de maguery*, 123  
  
*Hacendados*, 7  
 Haggard, Rider, 161  
 Hakluyt, R., 164  
 Hale, Susan, 165  
 Hall, Captain Basil, 164  
 Hamaca, Rio de la, 45-6  
 Hardy, Lieut. R. W. H., 164  
 Hats, 148  
 Hawkins, J., 164  
*Heloderma horridum*, 121  
 Helps, Sir Arthur, 165  
*Henequén*, 122-3  
*Heno*, 25  
 Hergesheimer, Joseph, 161  
 Hermosillo (Sonora), 57  
 Hernandez, Francisco, 116  
 Hernandez Serrano, General Julio, 69  
 Herrera (Spanish architect), 139  
 Heye Foundation, 78  
 Hiel-llavio river, 47  
 Hieroglyphics, Mayan, etc., 134  
 Hill, S. S., 165  
 Holms, P. G., 166  
 Honduras, 92  
 Horses, 128-9  
 Howell, E. J., 165  
*Huachinango*, 130  
*Huapangos*, 154  
 Huastec Indians and language, 101, 130  
 Huáxtepec (Morelos), 116  
 Huejotzingo church, 135  
 Huetar civilisation (Costa Rica), 81  
*Huexolotl*, 120  
 Huexotla (Mexico), 87  
 Huichol Indians, 103, 147, 148  
*Huipiles*, 47, 147  
 Huitzilpochtli (Huichilobos), 91  
 Humboldt, Baron Alexander von, 98, 106, 161  
 Humming-birds, 119-20  
 Huxley, Aldous, 166  
 Hyde, Colonel H. Montgomery, 167  
  
 IDEOGRAPHS, 134  
 Ignacio, Desemboque Arroyo San, 60  
 "Indios Bravos", 102  
 Infiernillo, El, 61  
 Inglis, Fanny (see Calderón de la Barca)  
 Iturbide, "Emperor", 156  
 Itzas, the, 95  
 Ixmiquilpan church, 136  
 Ixtaccfhuatl, 9, 67  
 Ixtlán del Rio (Nayarit), 79  
*Izcuintles*, 84-5

- Jabalí*, 124  
*Jacaranda*, 26  
 Jade, jadeite, 56, 82, 83  
 Jaguar, 117  
 Jaina, Island of (Campeche), 82  
 Jesuits, 59, 137  
 Jimenez Moreno, Wigberto, 76-7, 101  
 Jiquilpan (Michoacán), 152  
 Jorullo volcano, 71  
 Joyce, T. A., 76, 166  
 Juarez, President Benito, 7, 47, 149  
  
 KEATINGE, M., 162  
 Kelemen, P., 161  
 Kelly, Isabel, 81  
 Kikapoo Indians, 103  
 Kingsborough, Lord, 76, 134, 164  
 Kinkajou, 117, 125  
 Kino, Bahía, 58-9  
 Kino, Fray Francisco Eusebio, 59  
 Kisch, E. E., 122  
 Kroeber, A. L., 60-1  
 Kukulcan, 91  
 Kunkaak (*see* Seris)  
 Kunkaak, Sierra de, 64  
  
 LACANDÓN Indians, 97, 103  
 Lagos de Moreno church, 139  
 Lagunilla, La, 96, 157  
 Latrobe, C. G., 88, 165  
 Lawrence, D. H., 71  
 Leighton, G., 161  
 Lemprière, C., 165  
 León, 117  
 Lienzos, 133-4  
 Lindsay, N., 153  
 Linne, S., 76, 84  
 Lockhart, J. I., 162  
 Lopez, Gregorio, 105  
 Loro, 121  
 Lumholtz, C., 160  
 Lyon, Captain G. F., 37, 123, 164  
  
 MACAWS, 121  
 McCullagh, Captain F., 166  
 McGee (American scientist), 60-1, 65  
 MacHugh, R. J., 166  
 Mackenzie, D., 107, 166  
 Madre, Sierra, 3  
 Magaña, Mardonio, 152  
 Magueyes, 19, 123  
 Maize, 93, 122, 129  
 Malinalco (Mexico), 87  
 Mamey, 130  
 Mapache, 117  
 Maps, 142  
 Marett, R., 166  
  
 Mariachis, 154  
 Marihuana, 15  
 Marimba, 154  
 Markets, 13  
 Marquina, Ignacio, 76  
*Martica*, 117  
 Martin, P., 165  
 Martinez, Maximo, 114  
 Martinez (Zapotec family), 8, 40  
     *et seq.*  
 Masks, 82, 145-6  
 Mason, R. H., 165  
 Masturzi, Col. Giovanni, 60  
 Matamoros Izucar (Puebla), 145  
 Maudslay, A., 76, 162, 165  
 Maximilian, Emperor, 24, 149, 156  
 May, Karl, 123  
 Maya civilisation, Indians, names and  
     language, 7, 9, 74, 76, 82, 91-5,  
     101, 103, 108, 115, 122, 133-4  
 Mayer, Brantz, 160  
 Mayo Indians, 102  
 Mazatlán (Sinaloa), 51  
*Mecapál*, 21, 43  
 Médioni, G. and M. T., 161  
 Mendieta y Nuñez, Lucio, 105 *et seq.*  
 Mendizabal (Mexican ethnologist),  
     101  
 Mérida, Carlos, 152  
 Meridian 21° N., 8, 76, 102  
*Mescal*, 123-4  
 Mesquital, El, 124  
 Messervy, G. P., 166  
*Mestizos*, 6, 7, 15  
*Metalas*, 81  
 Metepec (Mexico), 144  
 Mexicano Indians and language, 98,  
     101, 103  
 Mexico City, 17-39, 138, 139  
 Mexico, Valley of, 17-20  
 Mextli, 88  
*Micoleon, mico de noche*, 117, 125  
 Mije (or Mixe) Indians and language,  
     43, 49, 51-2, 54, 148  
 Mill, N., 164  
 Miller, W., 52  
 Mitchell, L. J., 166  
 Mitford, Lt.-Col. J. B. O., 167  
 Mitla (Oaxaca), 40-2, 87, 137  
 Mixcuic (Mexico), 20  
 Mixtec civilisation and Indians, 9, 56,  
     83, 98, 101, 148  
 Moats, L. and A. L., 161  
 Moctezuma, 24, 91  
*Molcajetes*, 85  
*Moles*, 129  
 Monkeys, 118  
 Monte Alban (Oaxaca), 87



- Montenegro, Roberto, 152  
*Mordidas*, 30  
 Morelia cathedral, 138, 155  
 Morley, Sylvanus, 76  
 Morris, J. Bayard, 162  
 Murillo, Gerardo (Dr. Atl), 152  
 Museum, British, 85  
     Campeche, 78  
     Mexican National, 78, 134  
     Mexican Natural History, 116  
     Oaxaca, 78, 83  
     Philadelphia University, 78  
     Ethnographical of Sweden, 84  
 Music, 153-6  
 Mythology, 107  
  
 NAHUATL languages, 8-9, 51  
 Names, 7-8  
*Nardo*, 26  
 Navajo (Navaho) Indians (U.S.A.), 97  
 Navarro y Noriega, Francisco, 98  
 Nayarit culture, 77, 84  
 Nephrite, 56  
 Neo-classical style, 140  
 Nevada, Sierra, 18, 19  
 Nicaragua, 9  
 Nicholas, T., 162  
*Nochebuena, Flor de*, 26  
 Nochixtlán (Oaxaca), 136  
 Nolasco, San Pedro, Island, 58  
 Noguera, Eduardo, 76  
*Nopales*, 130  
 Nuttall, Zelia, 80  
  
 OAXACA, City and churches, 41, 138  
     Obsidian, 81  
     Ocelot, 117  
     *Ocote*, 37  
     Ocotlán, Church of Nuestra Señora, 139  
     Ogilby, J., 164  
     Olinalá (Guerrero), 146  
     Olmec civilisation, 80, 82  
     Onchocercosis, 99  
     Opossum, 117  
     Ordaz, Diego de, 17  
     Organ cactus, 42  
     Orozco, Jose Clemente, 151-3  
     Otomi Indians and language, 9, 98, 101, 147  
     Oxítl, 127  
  
 PACA, 117-8, 127  
*Pachycereus marginatus*, 42  
  
 Padilla, Ezequiel, 7, 14  
 Palacios, Enrique Juan, 76  
 Palenque (Chiapas), 82, 87, 92  
 Panotla church, 139  
 Papantla (Vera Cruz), 51  
 Parangaricutiro (Michoacán), 71  
 Parícutín, volcano, 71-2  
 Parkes, H. B., 161  
 Parakeets, 126  
 Parrots, 120-1, 126  
 Parsons, Elsie, 41, 161  
 Paso de Cortés, 18  
 Patamba (Michoacán), 143-4  
 Pátzcuaro (Michoacán), 71, 121  
 Paulson collection, 84  
 Peccary (*pecari*), 124  
 Pedregal lava-field, 79, 80  
 Pelícanos, Isla de los, 59  
 Pelicans, 59, 67  
*Pelota*, 31  
*Perico*, 121  
*Perico ligero*, 125  
*Perro mudo*, 127  
 Perú, árbol del (Pepper-tree), 19  
*Petates*, 148  
 Peten, The (Guatemala), 94  
 Peten Itzá, Lake (Guatemala), 95  
 Pictographs, 134  
*Pinto, mal de*, 99  
*Piragua*, Seri, 64  
*Pisole*, 117  
*Pitahaya*, 130  
 Place-names, 8-9  
 Plateresque style, 136, 137  
*Plumeria*, 26, 110  
 Poinsettia, 26  
 Polo, 32  
*Polyanthes tuberosa*, 26  
 Ponce, Manuel, 155  
*Ponchos*, 147  
 Popocatepetl, 9, 17  
*Popote, trabajo de*, 149  
 Poptla, 127  
 Pottery, domestic, 143-4  
 Pozas Arciniega, Ricardo, 143  
 Prescott, William, 20, 160  
 Press, metropolitan, 35-6  
 "Pretty lady" figurines, 81  
 Preuss, Konrad T., 76  
 Prieto, Cerro, 61-2  
 Puebla, cathedral, 139  
 Pueblo Indians (U.S.A.), 97  
*Pulque*, 15, 123  
*Pulquerías*, 21  
 Puma, 117  
 Pyramids, 79, 86-90  
 Pyrotechnics, 13, 38

- QUERETARO, churches, 139  
 Quetzalcoatl, 91  
   "temple of", 88  
*Quexquemill*, 147  
 Quiché Indians (Guatemala), 91, 102  
 Quiriguá (Guatemala), 92, 93-4  
 Quiroga (Michoacán), 146
- RACON, 117  
 Radio, 36  
 Rawson, Sir William, 164  
 Real del Monte mines, 159  
*Rebozos*, 147  
 Redfield, R., 161  
 Reid, Captain Mayne, 165  
*Rejas*, 20  
 Restaurants, 27-8  
*Relablos* (ex votos), 148  
 Revolution, Mexican, 1-2, 6, 14, 156-7  
 Revueltas, Silvestre, 155  
 Reyes, Jesus, 152  
 Rickards, Constantine G., 121, 166  
 Rio, Aurelio del, 122  
 Rivera, Diego, 85, 150-3  
 Rivet, Paul, 76  
 Robertson, Dr. W., 164  
 Robertson, W. P., 165  
 Robinson, W. D., 164  
 Rodents, 118  
*Rodetes*, 50  
 Rogers, Woodes, 164  
 Romero, Chico, 61  
 Rosa, Bay of Santa, 65  
 Rosalia, Santa (Baja California), 58  
 Ruxton, Lieutenant G. H., 165
- SACRIFICES, human, 90  
 Sacrificios, Isla de los, 26  
 Sahagún, Fray Bernardino de, 127  
*Saino*, 125  
 Salvador, El, 92, 128  
 Sanchez, Garza, J., 156-7  
 Sanchez Hernandez, General Tomás, 2  
 Sanderson, I., 118  
*Sandías*, 130  
 Santiago, Petronila, 42  
*Sarapes*, 146  
 Sartorius, C., 165  
 Sayula pottery, 145  
 Scorpions, 121  
 Scripts, 133-4  
 Sea-lions, 58, 118  
 Seler, Eduard, 76  
 Seri (or Kunkaak) Indians, 57-69, 97, 103, 107-8, 153
- Shellabarger, Samuel, 161  
 Sheridan, Clare, 166  
 Silkworms, 52  
 Simpson, Dr. E. M., 161  
 Siqueiros, David Alfaro, 150-3  
*Sisal*, 122-3  
 Sloth, 125  
 Smithsonian Institute, 78  
*Sones veracruzanos*, 154  
 Soustelle, Jacques, 76  
 Sousa-Novelo, Dr. Narciso, 108  
 Spanish, Mexican, 10-11  
 Spanish moss, 25  
 Spence, L., 76, 107, 166  
 Spinden, H. J., 76, 160  
 Spratling, W., 161  
 Stelæ, Mayan, 93  
 Stephens, J. L., 76, 88, 160, 165  
 Stevens, Captain J., 162  
 Storm, Marian, 107  
 Strode, Hudson, 161  
 Swann de Malinowski, Valetta, 162  
 Symphony Orchestra, Mexican, 32, 155
- TACUBA (D. F.), 23  
 Tacubaya (D. F.), 23  
 Tajín, pyramid, 87  
*Talavera de Puebla*, 138  
*Tamales*, 129  
*Tamborcito*, 153  
 Tapir, 117  
 Tarahumara Indians and language, 97, 101, 102  
 Tarascan culture, Indians and language, 9, 71, 77, 80-1, 84, 98, 146  
 Taxco, churches, 138  
*Taxodium mucronatum*, 25  
 Tayra, 125  
 Tecomate (Sonora), 61  
 Tecomates, Piedra de los, 89  
 Tehuano Indians, 50  
 Tehuantepec, isthmus, 3, 69  
 Tenayuca, pyramid, 20, 87, 90  
 Tenochtitlán, 4, 18, 20  
*Teocallis* (see Pyramids)  
 Teopanzolco, pyramid, 88  
 Teotihuacán, culture, ruins, valley, 4, 76, 77, 79, 80, 82, 88, 91, 102, 104  
 Teotitlán del Valle (Oaxaca), 147  
 Teotlixco (Puebla), 127  
 Tepeaca, church, 136  
*Tepeizcuintle* (dog), 118, 127  
*Tepezcuintle* (rodent), 117, 127  
 Tepic (Nayarit), 51  
*Teponaxtli*, 153

- Tepotzotlán, church (Mexico), 138,  
 139, 140-1  
 Tepozteco, pyramid (Morelos), 88  
 Tepoztlán, church (Morelos), 136  
*Tequila*, 15, 70, 123-4  
 Terry, T. P., 161  
*Tellamín*, 127  
 Texcoco, Lake, 18, 118  
*Teuitzotl*, 127  
 Tezcatlipoca, 91  
*Tezonille*, 20  
 Theft, 29  
 Thompson, G. A., 162  
 Thompson, J. E. S., 76, 166  
 Thomson, Roberto, 64  
 Tiburón island, 57-69  
*Tigre*, 117  
*Tigrillo*, 117, 125  
 Tikal (Guatemala), 92  
*Tlachiquero*, 123  
 Tlacoachahuaya, church of San Jeró-  
 nimo, 139, 148,  
 Tlacolula, church, 139  
*Tlacuazin*, 117  
 Tlahuitoltepec (Oaxaca), 51  
*Tlalchichi*, 127  
 Tlalmanalco, convent, 136  
 Tlalnepantla (D. F.), 9  
 Tlaltelolco (D. F.), 9, 79, 88  
 Tlaloc (rain-god), 89, 91  
 Tlaloc, Cerro, 88, 89  
*Tlamemes*, 21  
 Tlaquepaque, San Pedro (Jalisco),  
 144  
 Tlatilco (D. F.), 4, 78  
 Tlatlaya (Mexico), 154  
 Tlaxcala, Franciscan Mission, 135  
 Tlaxcalan Indians, 9, 18, 51  
 Tolimán (Guerrero), 144  
 Tolttec civilisation and ruins, 4, 76,  
 80, 102  
 Toluca (Mexico), 148  
*Tonalamatl*, 90  
 Tonanzintla, church of Santa María,  
 139  
 Tonatiuh, 88  
*Tonina*, 58  
 Topography, 3-4  
 Toro y Gallardo, Rafael and wife,  
 42  
 Tortillas, 122  
 Totonac civilisation, Indians and  
 language, 9, 50, 82-3, 98, 101, 146,  
 147  
*Totua*, 66  
 Townsend, T., 162  
 Toztlán, 127  
 Trend, J. B., 167  
 Tres Marias, Islands, 121  
 Tresguerras (architect), 139  
*Tsopilott*, 119  
 Tuberoses, 26  
 Tudor, H., 164  
 Tula (Hidalgo), 4, 78-9, 80, 88, 94  
 Tule, Santa María de (Oaxaca), 25  
*Tunas*, 130  
 Turkeys, 120  
 Turquoise inlay, 85  
 Turtle, green (*caguama*), 62  
 Tweedie, Mrs. Alec, 165  
 Tylor, Sir Edward, 165  
*Tzolkin*, 90  
 UAXACTUN (Guatemala), 92  
 Underwood, L., 162  
 Uring, Captain N., 164  
 Urns, Zapotec funerary, 83  
 Urubu, 119  
 Uruapan (Michoacán), 71, 146  
 Ursua y Arizmendi, Martín de, 95  
 Uxmál, ruins (Yucatán), 88, 92, 94,  
 108-9  
 VAILLANT, George, 76, 81-2, 161  
 Vargas, Eucario, 48  
 Velazco, Jose María, 150  
 Vigne, G. T., 165  
 Villa Alta (Oaxaca), 46-7  
 Villa Hidalgo (*see* Yalalag)  
 Viterbo, Church of Santa Rosa, 139  
 Vultures, 119  
 WAFER, L., 164  
 Wallace, D., 166  
 Ward, H. G., 164  
 Ward, Mrs. H. G., 164  
 Weitlaner, Roberto, 57, 67, 147,  
 153-4  
 Women, Mexican, 15  
 Wortley, Lady Emmeline Stuart, 165  
 XALOSTÓC (Mexico), 79  
 Xaltocán, Lake (Mexico), 18  
 Xeri Indians (*see* Seri)  
 Ximenez, Fray Francisco, 116  
 Xochicalco pyramid, 88, 91  
 Xochimilco, "lake", 18, 20, 118  
*Xochiocyotl*, 127  
*Xoloizcuinitle*, 127  
*X-pulyaah*, 109-13  
 YAQUI Indians, 8, 146  
 Yalalag, or Villa Hidalgo (Oaxaca),  
 46-54

- Yanhuitlán, church (Oaxaca), 136-7  
 Yecapixtla, church (Morelos), 136  
 Yohualinchán, pyramid (Vera Cruz),  
   87  
 Yokes, Totonac, 83  
 Yucatán, Conquest of, 95  
 Yukalpetén, Yucatan, 109  
 Yuma Indians (U.S.A.), 97  
 Yuririapundaro, church (Guana-  
   juato), 136  
 ZACATECAS, cathedral and mines,  
   139, 159  
 Zacatenco (Mexico), 4  
*Zapote negro*, 130  
 Zapotec civilisation, Indians and  
   language, 9, 40, 46, 50, 56, 57, 74,  
   83-4, 98, 101, 103, 148  
 Zapotlanejo, church (Jalisco), 140  
 Zempoala, ruins (Vera Cruz), 88  
 Zempoaltepetl (Oaxaca), 3  
 Zoological gardens, 117  
*Zopilotes*, 119  
*Zorra*, 125  
 Zumpango, lake (Mexico), 18  
 Zumpango del Río (Guerrero), 144



